The Count Is the Mercy

Disguised Suicide and the Coroner's Verdict

David Boles

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This is a work of nonfiction built from public records, published research, and the author's own memory. Its rules are printed in A Note on Evidence: what was verified at the page is presented as verified; what is known only from another source is labeled as second-hand; what was not found is reported as not found, with the search's scope, and never as a thing that never happened. The trooper at the center of this book is unnamed because his name is forgotten, and no detail in this book is invented to stand for a real one. The fourteenth chapter is a sensitivity exercise, declared as one, and no figure in it is an estimate.

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For Janna,
and for the uncounted.

Death by trauma resulting from an accident, absent suspicious circumstances.

the exemption in Nebraska Revised Statute section 23-1824, in force since 1999

Without explicit criteria certifiers may be more susceptible to pressures from families or communities not to certify a death as suicide, and the degree of underreporting is unknown.

Rosenberg and colleagues, "Operational Criteria for the Determination of Suicide," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, volume 33, page 1446, November 1988

Single-car road deaths: disguised suicides?

the title of Jennifer Jenkins and Peter Sainsbury's one-page paper in the *British Medical Journal*, volume 281, page 1041, October 18, 1980

This book is about suicide, and about the systems that count it. It contains no instructions and no methods, and it argues for the honest counting of every death. If you are struggling, or you are reading this book for someone you are worried about: for support in the United States, call or text 988, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The same line rides at the end of every chapter, and it is the most important sentence in the book.

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A Note on Evidence

This book rests, at its base, on a remembered conversation. Everything a reader needs to judge that foundation is stated here and again in Chapter One, because a foundation belongs where the weight lands. In the fall of 1983, while researching a play, the author spent an afternoon interviewing a Nebraska State Trooper about law enforcement. Inside that interview, as an aside, the trooper said that the lone driver who dies on a Nebraska highway in the middle of the night has usually meant to die. The trooper's name is forgotten, and he is unnamed in these pages because of that forgetting and never by courtesy. He was the father of one of the student teachers assigned to my mother, a teacher. I met with him several times over the years, and the name did not survive them, which is the record's own first loss, printed where the record begins. The conversation that carried the claim covered several subjects, suicidal tendencies among them; the remark about lone drivers arrived as a by-the-way, off the subject on the table. No notes record the aside. The play that grew out of the larger conversation, a one-act called *Murder in Ernest*, was written that year and produced in Lincoln in the spring of 1984. It contains no road, no vehicle, and no trooper, and it is no record of the aside. The earliest written form of the claim is the author's article of September 2026, published forty-three years after the conversation, and this book does not pretend otherwise. He has not been sought since, for this book or otherwise. The one story he told that might survive as a public event was not searched for, because finding it could identify a private man this book has promised to leave unnamed. Whether he is alive is unknown. His testimony is recollected testimony

with serious limits, and it is treated that way throughout: the book asks it as a question, and assumes no answer.

One limit has its own name. His word was usually, and the scope of usually cannot be recovered. What he was counting is a hole in the evidence that nothing can fill: all road deaths, or lone crashes, or night crashes, or only the cases he privately found suspicious. Every chapter that weighs his claim weighs it with the hole in it.

The book keeps seven claims apart, because evidence for the first two is not evidence for the rest, and the grades the inquest returns on them belong to the last chapter. First, that some road deaths are intentional. Second, that some intentional road deaths are misclassified. Third, that some people intend their deaths to be mistaken for accidents. Fourth, that some certifiers accommodate families. Fifth, that some certifiers certify suspected suicides as accidents out of mercy. Sixth, that the mechanism operated materially in the trooper's Nebraska. Seventh, that the undercount affected prevention or planning. The claims stay apart, and the seams stay visible: each chapter prints its evidence at its own width, and the verdict grades the seven only at the end.

Documents come first. Every number in the text is backed by a dated table in the Tables at the back of the book, with its denominator; the chapters carry the mechanism and the apparatus carries the measurement. Two kinds of interview were ruled permissible. Retired troopers and rural sheriffs of the era could be asked, at pattern level and with no cases, whether the belief the trooper held was shared. County attorneys could be asked, on the record, how the manner box is used in a rural county: about practice, never about cases. As of this writing none had been conducted. The chapters that would carry their returns, the sixteenth and the eighteenth, are written to

stand without them and say so where their absence matters. Everything else the book knows comes from documents and published research, graded as what it is: the original record, authoritative scholarship, reporting, reference works admitted as exhibits, and second-hand reports. Anything known only at second hand prints as reported at second hand, in those words, with the reporting source named, or it does not print. Where a search found nothing, the book says nothing was found and names the search; it never says the thing never happened. Where the record stopped, the sentence stopped, and claims shrink to what can be proved: some is never promoted to all, can to will, missing to zero, uncertain to false, compatible with to caused by, occurrence to prevalence.

The dead stay at pattern level. No individual Nebraska death is reconstructed from a county paper or a courthouse record, because a book that indicts the ledger's mercy cannot then strip that mercy from one kitchen. This is the book's Distance Rule, named here by name, as the chapters will invoke it. The dead are described at pattern level and never reconstructed. The criteria the classification literature uses appear once, in Chapter Three, stated as criteria in the investigator's voice, and never as instructions: no speed is recommended, no road, no object, and no act is shown being planned. No anticipated benefit of concealment is presented as a benefit achieved, and a person's reported belief is kept apart from what happened. The chapters were audited as a whole against one named question: does any sequence of them leave the impression that concealment is achievable. The counter-evidence is carried in the open, since investigations frequently do find intent, in notes, in histories, in prior attempts, and now in the car's own memory. That is also the truth.

Several corrections are inherited from the article this book

expands, and they stand here in the open. The county attorney's coronership dates to 1915; the article's 1943 was a compilation year. The medical examiner of Chapter Seven is John F. Edland; the article's James was an error. The first author of the 2024 review is Igor Radun; the article's Ivan was an error. Australia's coroners were never convened; researchers read their files. The child-autopsy mandate belongs to 1999, after the trooper's years, which had no mandate at all. Finnish driver suicides were mostly collisions with heavy vehicles; the trooper's lone crash is the American and Australian shape. One pair of tables in a Queensland paper disagrees with itself, and neither figure prints. And no careful review states a floor of about two percent; the arithmetic chapter prints the band the reviews do state and corrects the floor on its own page.

Chapter Fourteen is a sensitivity exercise, declared as one from its first line to its last. It shows what each assumption implies and never what the number should be. The numbers live in the Tables, dated, with their denominators and their silences labeled: suppressed, zero, unavailable, noncomparable, each kept apart from the others. The first duty of a book about a count is to keep its own count honest.

Movement I. The View

Chapter One

Driver Lost Control

In the fall of 1983 I was a sophomore at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, and I was writing a play. It was about a death that looks like one thing and is another. I needed to understand how death gets policed in a county with more cattle than people. My mother taught school, and one of the student teachers assigned to her had a father who was a Nebraska State Trooper. He and I had spoken several times over the years about law enforcement, the way a boy who reads too much will corner the one adult he knows who does the work, and he agreed to sit for an interview. He was a careful man with a careful voice, and the interview had a list of subjects. The border between the county sheriff and the state patrol: who answers to whom, and where the line runs. Jurisdiction, and how it frays at two in the morning. Drugs coming up the interstate. Homicide, rare and heavy. And how causes of death get decided where the nearest pathologist is a hundred miles away. Suicidal tendencies were on the list, because the play needed them. The claim this book is about was on no list. It arrived as an aside, a by-the-way, said low, and the lowness is part of the evidence, because an aside is what a man offers when the thing he is about to say is off the subject on the table.

We covered the list first. Where we sat, what hour, what he wore: I do not trust myself on any of it, and I will not build a scene I cannot document. He answered the list the way he wrote reports, completely and without decoration, and he did not wander. He told me how the deciding worked: that in Nebraska the county attorney, the prosecutor, is the coroner, and

that the man who rules on what a death was is usually a man who had not walked the ditch. I wrote that down in my head, because the play needed exactly that, a machinery for mistaking one death for another. Then the talk turned to death on the road, and he lowered his voice. I cannot hand his sentence back word for word across forty-three years. I first wrote it down in September of 2026. This is what I wrote: when you read about a one-car crash that kills the driver on a Nebraska highway in the middle of the night, you are usually reading about a suicide. The car alone, the road empty, the bridge or the embankment at full cruise. There are no skid marks, because a man driving toward death on purpose has no reason to brake. The accident is the costume; the intent is underneath. The crash report says he lost control. There is no note. There is no witness. That is the shape of it as I carried it away from the table, and as I first set it in print, and I will not pretend the prepositions are his. The word I will swear to is *usually*. He said it the way a man says a thing he has decided not to examine anymore: quietly, completely. Then the interview moved on. The claim did not contain a name, a date, a county, a case. He accused no one and excused no one. He described a pattern and let it stand. The middle of the night did its own work in the sentence. It named the hour when the road empties, when the only witnesses are mile markers. At that hour a crash becomes a thing that happened, and no one saw it happen.

Usually is the word this book spends itself on, so the hole in it comes first. What was he counting? Every road death on his stretch, or only the lone crashes, or only the night crashes, or only the cases he privately found suspicious, the ones that failed some test he never named? If he meant half of all road deaths, the claim is enormous. If he meant half of the lone night crashes that had already stirred his doubt, the claim shrinks to-

ward something the record can almost hold. The distance between those two readings is the distance between an indictment and a hunch, and no one can say where on it he stood. A claim's scope decides whether it can be tested at all. At its widest, his *usually* would have to outnumber every drunk driver and every sleeping driver on every road in the state. At its narrowest, it is a claim about a handful of wrecks a year, and testing it becomes an exercise in reading silences. I did not ask, because I was a sophomore and the remark was a by-the-way in a conversation about something else. He did not say, because an aside does not carry its denominator. Forty-three years later there is no notebook to consult. The scope of his *usually* is unrecoverable, and every chapter of this book that weighs his claim weighs it with that hole in it. The hole never closes.

His credential, though, is not small. He had worked those highways for twenty years by then, as he told it, from about 1960 to about 1980, and twenty years on Nebraska roads is an education no one else in this book can match. Twenty years of midnight calls. Twenty years of ditches walked with a flashlight, of wind, of bodies lifted from cars on roads so empty the nearest witness might be a mile of corn. What he knew, he knew from scenes, and the scenes kept showing him the same silhouette: the car alone, the road straight and dry, the speed high, the driver dead, the family waiting to be told. The work included the telling, too: the drive out to the farmhouse or the back door in town, the sentence that had to be built on the doorstep out of nothing. A trooper does not get to look away from that repetition, and he does not get to file it anywhere that matters. What a man knows after twenty years of ditches is real whether or not a form exists to receive it. The paperwork of his era asked everything of the road and nothing of him. The state's own historical table counts the people killed on Nebraska roads year by year,

located by the crash. It counted 292 in 1960, when his career was beginning; 489 in 1971, the worst year of his era; and 255 in 1983, the year we talked. Each of those numbers was a person, a form, a signature, a family. A trooper working the interstate met only a fraction of them, and I do not know his fraction. I know that the fatal wreck in his working life was a rhythm, a call that came in the dark and kept coming. Each one ended the same way on paper, with a form that measured the road and a signature that named the death. Somewhere in that rhythm, he came to believe, were deaths that did not belong to the road at all, deaths the road was hired to carry. He said so once, in an undertone, to a sophomore. Then the paperwork closed over them, as it always had. Where such knowledge goes, when no form asks for it, is the question that started this book.

His known road is Interstate 80. I know that from the one story he told at full voice, which comes later in this chapter, and I claim no other road for him. The stretch of it this book names runs from Grand Island west to the Wyoming line. It is the long flat run up the Platte valley and out of it, where a trooper's district could swallow two counties and the radio stayed quiet for hours. Eight counties front that stretch, and their county seats are the towns where the paperwork of death was done. The 1980 census counted six of those seats at 3,120 for Kimball, 5,638 for Ogallala, 7,040 for Lexington, 21,158 for Kearney, and 24,509 for North Platte. The biggest of them was Grand Island, at 33,180. The seventh seat is Sidney, in Cheyenne County, at 6,010, where the interstate's own spur splits away for Colorado. The eighth is Chappell, in Deuel County, where the whole county held 2,462 people. That is the scale of the world that decided what a death was. A courthouse on a square, a weekly paper, a county attorney who worked there and who knew the family of the dead man, or knew people who did. In a county of two or ten or twenty

thousand, there is no other way to live. The small town that runs through this book is measured by those numbers and by nothing invented. As for the empty two-lane west of Grand Island at two in the morning, where this book's last image lives, that is my image, assembled in my own head across the years since. It was never his, and nothing in these pages attributes it to him.

The division of labor matters here, because the whole book lives inside it. The trooper worked the wreck: the flashlight, the measurements, the notification at the door. His authority ended at the scene's edge. The county attorney named the death. One man saw the scene and the other man held the pen, and in a small county the second man was elected to prosecute the living, a job he kept by standing well with the neighbors of the dead. I do not say he misused the pen. I say the pen and the ditch were never in the same hand, and the trooper knew it, and the aside was what that knowledge sounded like after twenty years. The decider's world deserves its own account here, at pattern level, because the statutes built it and the census measured it. A Nebraska county attorney of that era prosecuted the county's crimes, advised its officers, handled its juvenile and civil work, and answered to the voters of a county that might hold two thousand people. Death investigation arrived at his desk unscheduled, carried by a trooper or a sheriff's deputy, in a folder thin as the scene was ambiguous. He had no laboratory of his own, no staff pathologist, and no one above him whose job was to review the manner he selected. What he wrote, stood. The trooper knew those courthouses the way a traveling man knows them, by their doors and their hours, and he delivered the dead to them without ever holding their pen. The machinery of that office, when each part was built and what each part was built to do, is the fourth chapter's subject. Here it is enough to hold the

shape of the day the trooper's claim ran against: a prosecutor's pen held over a box, in a town where the family down the road was not an abstraction.

Once only, in the conversations I remember, he said he had been afraid for his life, and he told it at full voice. It was the answer to the one question a boy always has for a man with a badge, and he honored the question with the truth. What follows is my recollection of his account, and I will not dress it as a scene. A chase on Interstate 80, at speeds he did not name. A suspect who finally pulled over, a gun visible in the car, and who then ran into a cornfield on foot. No backup; the nearest trooper an hour away. He went in after the man alone, revolver drawn, hat angled against the sun, and searched the rows for an hour. He made the arrest. No shots were fired. That is the story as I remember his telling of it, and I have kept its proportions, the hour's walk, the angled hat, the particulars a man keeps. The day he described fearing for his life, he described it plainly, in the same even voice he used for jurisdiction and drugs. That matters for his standing as a witness. He was a man who reported fear accurately, without swelling it, and who reserved his one lowered voice for the dead. The claim about the dead came out low. A man does not lower his voice for nothing. The contrast between the two tellings is one of the things I have had forty-three years to think about: the fear at full voice, the certainty in an undertone. I have settled on this much. The lowered voice was the measure of the thing's weight, and of how badly the work had nowhere to put it.

Men of his place and era did not talk easily about such things, and the structure of the work gave the talk nowhere to go. The crash report had a box for everything the road could measure and no box for what he believed he was seeing. The county attorney's ledger had a box for manner, and that box belonged to

someone else, someone who had not walked the ditch. To say the suspicion aloud about any particular death was to accuse a grieving family, or to accuse the certifier who had signed. To say it about no particular death was barbershop talk. And the suspicion had a logic, which he laid out in a sentence or two. A man who means to die on the road, in his telling, dies with his insurance paid, his church burial intact, his family's story unbroken. The state will call the thing an accident, and the town will accept the word. So he carried it the way he carried everything else that could not be said aloud, and then one afternoon he handed it to a young man researching a play. I have never decided whether he chose a playwright because a playwright was safe, or because a playwright writes things down. If he wanted it recorded, it waited forty-three years to be recorded, which argues for safe. If he wanted it safe, he misjudged the trade.

Here is everything I know about the standing of that testimony, laid out where the weight lands. His name is forgotten, and he is unnamed in this book because the record begins that way; the anonymity is a fact, and not a courtesy added later. I met him several times over the years, and the name did not survive them, and that is the record's first loss, printed where the record begins. No notes record the aside. The play that grew out of the larger conversation was a one-act called *Murder in Ernest*, copyrighted in 1984 and produced by the Nebraska Directors Theatre in the spring of that year. It dramatizes a suicide that its own characters first take for a murder, staged inside the mind of the dead man. I read the script again, all twenty-six numbered pages of it, on September 25, 2026. There is no road in it, no vehicle, no trooper, and nothing of its ending is carried here. It is the conversation's creative consequence and no record of the aside. What the play asked, and what the interview was for, was how anyone proves what a death was. I did not no-

tice then that the aside answered my research question better than the interview did. The earliest written form of the claim is my article of September 2026, and I state that as a fact and not as a flaw: forty-three years passed between the saying and the writing down.

Anything that would have corroborated the aside is absent, and I name the absences so they cannot be mistaken for oversights. No notebook, no second hearer, no letter, no marginal line in the script, no program or notice of the production in any record I could reach. Whether he was sought afterward is my ruling to make, and I have made it. He was not sought, then or since. The cornfield arrest, the one piece of his account that might survive as a public event, was not searched for, because finding it could identify a private man this book has promised to leave unnamed. Whether he is alive is unknown. Nothing else from that afternoon appears in this book as testimony about any death. The jurisdiction talk, the drugs, the homicide, all of it was competently answered, and none of it is evidence here, because the book's subject is the aside. This book carries all of that openly because a book about the cost of hidden uncertainty has no right to hide its own.

So what is his testimony worth? Recollected testimony, four decades old, from a witness who cannot be produced, about a proportion he never measured. By the rules of any courthouse, including the one this book is about, that is weak evidence, and this book says so before any critic has to. It cannot corroborate itself. Yet an inquest begins exactly here, with the finder of the body heard at the view of it, before the experts, before the deliberation. The man who saw the thing first is owed the first hearing, and what he saw is owed a test, and the test has to be real: no reverence for his twenty years, no discount for his lowered voice. That is his place in this book. Whether the shape he

saw was what he thought it was belongs to the evidence, and the evidence gets the rest of the book. A claim of this shape can be tested three ways: against what was in print while he worked, against what the countries that look have found since, and against what Nebraska's own ledgers wrote down. The three tests can break the kind of his claim, and the book runs all three. The proportion inside it is untestable from the first page, because his denominator died with his scenes, and the book never pretends otherwise. If the journals of his years show no one asking his question, the kind of the claim fails. Should the countries that look find nothing, it fails again. A full Nebraska ledger where he found silence would break the kind entirely, and this book will say so in those words.

The scene could never tell him one thing by itself, and everything that follows grows from it. A sleeping driver, a drunk driver, and a driver who meant to leave the road can leave the same track. The same absent skid marks, the same fixed object, the same dead man. The scene narrows the possibilities, and then, most often, the scene ends, and the certifier is left with a track and a choice. Each of the three readings is common, and each is invisible in the wreck itself: the sleeper's absent skid is the drunk's absent skid is the intending driver's. Choosing among them is the certifier's whole task, and everything in this book turns on how that choice was made, by whom, under what pressures, with what evidence allowed. What the county paper printed, when it printed anything at all, was a formula, and I quote it as a formula, from the county weeklies I read in those years, without paper or date: driver lost control. Three words, and they did their work quietly. The formula asserted nothing about intent and said nothing false about the wreck, yet it made a certainty out of a morning nobody could reconstruct. A county weekly was the town's ledger of record, and its two inches be-

side the courthouse news were the last official sentence most of those deaths ever got. The item never said what the night had looked like or who had knocked on whose door, because the formula's job was to close the account. It never asked whether the driver meant it, and it always implied he had not. That quiet is this book's subject in miniature. The formula returns near the end of it, when the record has shown what such sentences were for.

Why return to it now? I cannot say why it waited forty-three years; memory keeps its own calendar, and mine has no documents for the decades between. I can say what had changed by the time the picture surfaced. In January 2025, reporters at the Flatwater Free Press examined the arrangement his claim ran through and found it standing. Their findings: the county attorney is still the coroner in all ninety-three Nebraska counties. On average 87 percent of the state's unattended deaths are never autopsied. And about 12.5 percent of deaths handled by coroners involved autopsies in the past six years of data, the same investigation's own pair of figures. The earlier newspaper series' 27 percent of 2000 to 2004 is set beside them, the two series from different years and never blended. And when Washington barred its prosecutors from the coroner's office at the start of that year, Nebraska's arrangement may have become the last of its kind, the only state where the elected prosecutor always rules on the dead. Meanwhile the other ledger had quietly inverted. A state newsletter on the federal violent-death reporting program counted 227 suicides among Nebraskans aged 35 to 55 in 2021 and 2022 alone, some 590 suicides in all across the two years. The state's roads in the same two years killed 465 people of every age. The despair outnumbers the road toll now, by the state's own columns. Then there is the car. In December 2024 the federal government ordered it to remember, length-

ening the pre-crash recording carried by nearly every new car from five seconds to twenty. The question he left me is becoming answerable by machinery, whether anyone asks it or not. The window in which his question belonged to memory alone is closing. And there is one more reason, plainer than the rest: I am the person he told, and a book about the cost of unrecorded knowledge cannot be tested honestly by anyone else. The witness and the investigator are the same man here, separated by forty-three years. That is the reason this book exists now: to ask his question properly, on the record, while the asking can still change what the record means.

I reopen it, then, as an investigator, and the method is declared before the first exhibit. Documents first. The statutes that built the courthouse. Forms that could and could not hold a suspicion. Journals of his own working years, and studies from the countries that investigate every fatal crash. The ledgers that count deaths, and the ledgers that quietly exclude them. Then two kinds of interview, at pattern level and never about cases, where pattern level means no case, no name, no location, and no date of any death. Retired troopers and rural sheriffs of his era could be asked whether the belief he voiced was shared. County attorneys could be asked, on the record, how the manner box is used in a rural county: practice and never cases. Both kinds were ruled permissible before drafting began. None had been conducted as of this writing, and the book owes the reason plainly. I am not a reporter with a newsroom behind me, and a sitting county attorney does not tell a stranger with a website how he decides which deaths were suicides. The two kinds were not tried, and the cost of that is stated where it lands. Nebraska's deciders are heard in this book through a reporter and a survey, and no further. Every claim the book makes about their practice is built to stand on documents alone. Everything else this book

knows comes from the documents, graded as what they are: the original record, authoritative scholarship, reporting, reference works admitted as exhibits, and second-hand reports, labeled in those words wherever the original could not be reached. Documents can fix the design of a system beyond argument. What no document can do is reopen one particular midnight. This book does not try.

The test runs on a simple plan, because the plan is older than the state he worked for. Old England's coroner held an inquest in four movements, and this book holds to them: the view of the body, the witnesses, the deliberation, the verdict. The form is the subject's, and that is a deliberate rhyme, because the English coroner's jury is the body that learned, centuries ago, to soften a verdict for a family's sake. This book borrows their procedure to examine their descendant. He is heard first, at the view, because he found the bodies. The finder of the body is the inquest's oldest witness, the man whose report summons the jury. This book summons no jury. It owes him the hearing anyway, because he earned it the hard way, one ditch at a time. He would not have asked for the hearing. That is why it is owed. Behind him come the scientists of his own years, who were printing his suspicion in the journals while he walked the ditches, and the countries that built systems to look. The deliberation weighs what the paperwork did, what mercy cost, and what suspicion costs. The verdict is returned at the width of the evidence and no wider, and every verdict the evidence earns is printed, including the ones against him. Some of what he believed will survive all of that. Some of it will not. The reader will be able to tell which is which, because this book never hides the seam between what the record shows and what the record cannot show.

What survives already is the picture, and it has kept office hours in my head for forty-three years. It arrives at two in the

morning: a man alone on a straight road with nothing to hit, and the speedometer holding. Growing up in Nebraska, under that sky and in that heavy summer air, I grasped the logic of such a death at once when he described it. It was a Midwestern way of dying, a private catastrophe wrapped in a public fiction so complete that even the state participated. Reticence was the region's manners and its morals at once: you did not ask, and you did not tell. The roads were long, the houses far apart, and a man's reasons were his own property. A boy could understand all of that without being able to name any of it, and I understood. The county paper printed the word accident, and the town understood or did not, according to its willingness. There were reasons a family might want the fiction and reasons a courthouse might supply it, and this book prices all of them before it is done. He told the truth as he knew it, too large, too low, and to a playwright, because the state gave him no other place to put it. I have lived in other places since, and none of them ever argued with the picture. For forty-three years the picture behaved like a memory, arriving uninvited and fading on command. It shaped how I read every county weekly I ever picked up, and every formula item I ever skimmed past. Writing it down in 2026 changed its status. It stopped being a picture and started being a claim, and a claim can be tested.

It still arrives at two in the morning. An empty road west of the last town, a needle holding against its peg, a county attorney's signature in a courthouse ledger, a town that understood or did not. The interstate he worked has been resurfaced so many times that nothing his flashlight touched remains on it. Forms have been redrawn. The office that decides is the office that decided, and the aside is still unwritten anywhere but here. He is unnamed, the road he worked is a known road, and the claim he made is a testable claim, and this book tests it. What

the road knew is what the rest of these pages set out to learn.

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Chapter Two

Nobody Was Counting

The document is a census with a birthday. A census with a birthday is a reminder that counting is a decision, and decisions have dates. In 1975 the federal government opened the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, a census of fatal motor vehicle traffic crashes built from the states' own reports and coded under a single definition. For the first time the country could count its road deaths the way it counted its people. Every fatal crash in scope, year by year, with the circumstances coded so that a planner could ask the count where the deaths cluster and what to build against them. The census exists because someone meant to aim countermeasures with it. A census is a demanding instrument: it needs a definition strict enough to hold fifty states to one meaning, coding rules strict enough to survive the states' differences, and a reason for every death to be in or out. Whether such a census can see the death that means to happen is the question this book carries into every ledger it opens. The reason, in this census, was the standard with the door. The trooper's career was fifteen years old by then. Fifteen years is most of a working life, and he had spent it in a country that kept no national count of what killed its drivers. Nothing was mailed to him from Washington. No column existed in which his suspicion could have been entered, even if he had found the nerve to enter it; in principle, in 1968, there was nowhere federal for it to go. Whatever he noticed from 1960 to 1975, he noticed alone, in a nation that had not yet built the ledger. That timing matters to everything that follows: his era is the hardest to measure precisely because the federal instrument arrived as he was leav-

ing, and the years his claim describes are the years before the counting had rules. And the tree this chapter walks was busy. In the years the state's historical table records for his career, Nebraska's roads killed between 292 and 489 people a year, and each of those deaths walked every station in this chapter.

A system founded in 1975 cannot have counted 1968; that much is proof against legend. The absence of a national database is a different thing from the absence of counting, and this chapter is the careful separation of the two. The counties counted, in the courthouse ledger and the coroner file. State government counted, in annual reports printed in Lincoln, the trooper's state among them; the one era edition I hold is my own copy of the 1982 report, and its taxonomy has no category for intent. Its categories are the road's: fixed object, overturn, other noncollision, county by county. The county weekly counted, in its way, one item at a time beside the courthouse news. What did not exist was the single federal census with a single definition. The definition, when it arrived, is where the story lives, because the definition had a door in it.

The definition does not live in the census bureau or the highway agency. It lives in a standard with a plain title, the Manual on Classification of Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents, known by its number, ANSI D16.1, and the federal crash system defines a crash by it. A standard of that kind exists so that a fatal crash in one state means the same thing in the next, so the national count counts the same events everywhere. The edition I read at the page is the seventh, published in 2007. The federal coding manuals built on the standard point their coders to its paragraphs on the harmful event, deliberate intent, legal intervention, and the unstabilized situation, so the standard's text is the text that sorts the deaths. On its definition pages the standard does two things that decide everything. At section 2.4.2 it classifies sui-

cide, self-inflicted injury, and homicide as deliberate intent, defined as an event in which a person acts deliberately to cause it. At section 2.4.4 it excludes from the definition of an accident any set of events that results from deliberate intent or legal intervention. The standard is more careful than its reputation in both directions: it distinguishes consequences beyond what was intended, so the definition is subtler than a ban, and it is a ban all the same. Legal intervention sits inside the same exclusion, which calibrates what the door is for: the traffic census counts the deaths the road caused by mischance, and the state's deliberate acts were never mischance either. Follow the logic all the way through. A death by deliberate intent is a defined thing, and a defined thing of that kind sits outside the accident the traffic ledger counts, by construction. The trooper's category does not get misfiled in the traffic ledger. It leaves through a door the builders labeled, a door out of the definition itself.

How old is the door? An eighth edition, from 2017, is located, and the door is still in it. The first edition's year is unrecovered; a reader believed 1962, and I could not verify it. What the text said in 1983, the year of the conversation, is unverified, and this book claims nothing about it. The two possibilities have different stakes, and both are left standing on purpose. If the door predates the census, then the traffic ledger never held such deaths at all, and the trooper's category was homeless from the start. If the door was built later, the early census years might read differently, and someone, someday, could read them. A reader's report says a 2014 federal coding manual directed coders to exclude a crash whose only fatality was an ascertained suicide. That report prints as a reader's report, unverified at the page. It would show the door being used by then, if it holds, and it would say nothing about when the door was hung. What is verified at the page is the 2007 text: the national

definition of a traffic accident excluded the trooper's category by construction. The first chapter described the crash form's missing box as the trooper's silence. That turns out to be the smaller half of the design. The larger half is a definition that excused the death before it was ever counted.

So the ledger was never one ledger. A death on a Nebraska road in the trooper's years could be written down in half a dozen places. Each place had its own rule about what could be said there, and its own silence about intent. The path of the information is a tree with branches, and the tree is worth walking slowly, station by station, because each station's silence is a different creature and flattens into a different book if walked too fast. The same questions are asked at each: who supplies the fact, who decides, who codes it; what uncertainty can be recorded; what is excluded; and whether a later finding can change the record. The book's case lives in the difference between the answers, and the answers are not the same at any two stations.

The first station is the police crash report, the trooper's own instrument. The investigating officer supplies it, from the scene, in the hours after the tow. What it holds is two kinds of testimony: coded fields, for what the road could measure, the surface, the vehicle, the conditions, the harmful event, and a narrative space with supplemental reports, for everything else. That division matters more than any box. A form without an intent field does not become a record with no place for the fact. An officer who suspected intent could write the suspicion into the narrative or attach it as a supplement, at two in the morning, against the weight of the obvious. The trooper's own account of the deciding put the box in another man's hand, and no form of his era has been found to show it gave an officer a field for intent. The narrative was written back at the office, in the officer's own words, and it went into the folder the county attorney re-

ceived; nothing about the codebooks read it. Whether the era's Nebraska form let him code intent anywhere is a question no one can answer, because the form itself is unseen. I could not recover it, and this book describes no form it has not seen. The officer codes; the state tabulates. Words can carry any uncertainty in the narrative, and the codes carry none. The supplemental report exists so that a later finding can change the file, and whether any was ever filed in a case like his is unrecorded.

Next, the funeral director, who in most states initiates the death certificate and files it. In the counties this book is about he was usually a neighbor, because a county that size holds no strangers, and the paper went into the kitchen with him. The certificate is the document this book is finally about, and it is two documents wearing one coat. Its medical part is cause of death. Its legal part is manner. The funeral director supplies the dead person's particulars, the name, the dates, the disposition, and starts the paper moving through the stations. He is the design's one constant: every death has a funeral home, and not every death has a doctor who can sign. The certificate he initiates is the one document every death in the country eventually gets, the single sheet on which the state will say, forever, what the death was. He decides nothing about what the death was, and the design assigns him the errand precisely because he decides nothing.

Then the fork. A driver could die at the scene or die in hospital, and from 1974 the difference mattered in law. Under LB 66 of that year, carried today at section 60-6,102, the coroner had to report a motor-vehicle death to the Department of Motor Vehicles within ten days. A driver who died within four hours of a crash had to be examined, with tests made for alcohol and drugs. The act was approved in January 1974, and it was operative law: a federal appeals court, in Blackledge v. Martin K. Eby

Construction Co. two years later, quoted its provisions. The results went to the Department of Motor Vehicles, to be tabulated monthly and used only for statistics that revealed no identity, the presence and concentration of alcohol or drugs, measured in the dead by order of law. The seal on identity made the mandate a statistical instrument, a measuring of the state's drinking, and not an inquiry into any one man's death. Chemistry has no column for meaning: the examination could report what was in the driver's blood and nothing about what was in his mind. The man who died at the ditch inside four hours was tested by mandate. The man who lingered past the mark, or whose death arrived by another path, walked out of the mandate's reach. A negative test proved sobriety and nothing else; the mandate measured chemistry and never intention. Whether the mandate was carried out in the rural counties, where the coroner was a prosecutor with no laboratory, is unrecorded, and the book says so. Whether the monthly tabulations the act required survive anywhere is likewise unrecorded; they would be the state's own alcohol data for fatal crashes from 1974, and no one has produced them. The statute's hour drew a line through the dead, and the line had nothing to do with what the driver had meant. What the state ordered tested, and what it never ordered, is the third chapter's hinge; here the fork matters as a station, the first place where the design sorted one kind of body from another.

At the fourth station, the coroner's file and the coroner's physician. Under section 23-1820, each county keeps a coroner's physician, who certifies the cause of death in every death an attending physician cannot certify, and who performs an autopsy when the coroner requests one. The attending-physician clause is its own quiet fork: a driver who died in hospital under a doctor's care could have his cause certified by that doctor, and the file could close without the coroner's station ever opening. The

current code carries a counterweight, and it belongs here because the bypass needs it: section 71-605 requires a death whose circumstances suggest neglect, violence, or unlawful means to be referred to the county attorney for investigation and certification. The referral duty exists in today's text; whether the era's practice invoked it for the driver who died in hospital is unrecorded, and the book does not pretend otherwise. Cause is the physician's word: the crushed chest, the bled artery, the medical fact. In a crash it is nearly always easy, and its ease is part of the story, because cause being easy lets the harder question pass unnoticed. A physician can certify what killed a man from a photograph of the wreck. The certificate's two halves are unequal in exactly that way: cause asks what killed him, which the body answers, while manner asks what the death was, which the body cannot answer. Nothing in the station asks what the man meant. In the trooper's years no autopsy mandate existed for anyone, child or adult; the only mandate the state has now, for children, arrived in 1999, and it has its own chapter's work ahead of it. That harder question, manner, waits at the fifth station.

The manner box belongs, in Nebraska, to the county attorney. The state's own County Attorney Manual for Filing Death Certificates, in its revision of July 2021, instructs him at page 10 to select the manner of death from a dropdown list. Addressed to county attorneys personally, the instruction gives that official the selection function; it answers the feared possibility that the county attorney only reviews a manner chosen elsewhere. What it does not prove is that no other authorized certifier can enter the manner, and the book carries the caveat. The state's data documentation lists the values: natural, suicide, accident, homicide, pending investigation, could not be determined. The list is worth a slow reading, and the book gives it one. Pending

investigation is the holding state, the box that waits: a slow suspicion could hold a file open there, and whether it ever did in a rural county is unrecorded. Could not be determined is the honest box, the one that says the evidence ran out. And accident is the box that settles. The list is cited as the state documents it. No blank certificate was photographed for this book, and the manual's instruction is the record here, in place of a specimen. How the box was filled in 1983 is unrecorded; the era's instruction is unseen, and the office that held the duty was the same office under the same statute. Today the prosecutor's pen holds the manner, by the state's own manual, in every one of the ninety-three counties.

The tree's shape is worth holding, because it is the chapter's finding. Intent is a question at exactly one station. The crash report measures the road; the certificate's medical half measures the body. The vital code classifies the cause; the traffic census counts the accident. Every other question a death raises gets answered somewhere in the design: who died, when, where, at what speed, of what injury. Only the manner box asks what the death was, and in Nebraska that box belongs to the man who prosecutes the county's crimes. The design answered its own questions well. The trooper's question was not among them. Picture the folder that reached him: the crash report with its measured road, the physician's cause, perhaps the mandated chemistry. Nothing in it asked about intent, so nothing in it answered. Every other station can be done well, done honestly, done to the letter, and the question the trooper whispered about never gets asked at all.

For his suspicion to survive this tree, a chain of volunteers had to hold. An officer had to write the suspicion into a narrative the codebooks would not read. The county attorney had to read it and hold the file at pending while he thought. The

coroner's physician had to be asked for more than cause. Someone had to carry the doubt past the certificate and into the vital record's one waiting code. Each link was optional, each link belonged to a different person, and every person in the chain had a reason to let the accident stand. The design did not forbid the truth. It asked the truth to fight uphill, unaccompanied, against everyone whose day would be easier without it. Most days, most years, in most counties, the truth did not fight. An unmeasured mercy looks like that from inside the paperwork: a staircase no one was forbidden to climb, and no one was asked to climb.

From the courthouse the fact climbs into the state's vital-statistics record and the federal code, and here the trooper's category had a home earlier than the traffic ledger did. Under ICD-9, in force from 1979, the code E958.5 named suicide and self-inflicted injury by crashing of motor vehicle. Under ICD-10, from 1999, the code is X82, intentional self-harm by the same means. The classification is international, which carries its own dry irony: the world's statisticians had named the death before the trooper's state had ever printed a line for it. Whether ICD-8, in force from 1968 through 1978, carried the same fourth-digit category in the era's own instructions is unconfirmed, and the book says so. The federal compressed file for those years, the ledger the era left behind, was checked for this book. Its cause list carries no crash-suicide category; a crash suicide of those years could file only into the residual line, other and unspecified means. The recoded list is not the era's instruction, and the book keeps the two apart. From 1979 onward the vital ledger could write this death down by name, in its own column, at the level of the state and the nation. The path runs from the certificate to the state registrar to the National Center for Health Statistics, each death coded once at the federal desk under the classification then in force. A column with a name is a promise that

can be read, and reading it has rules. The federal files that hold the counts suppress small sub-state cells, so a county's handful may never print. One count is kept by residence while the road count is kept by the crash's location, so the two are never the same population. The state's line has to be extracted with care, years pooled where the cells are small and silences labeled by cause, before it can be read at all. What Nebraska's line shows is a question with its own chapter later in this book, because the line has to be taken from the federal files first, and the taking is its own story.

The traffic census is the ledger the trooper's whisper indicted. It is also the ledger with the cleanest conscience of the three, since it never claimed to hold such deaths at all. FARS counts what its definition lets it count. The state's annual report, the Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts of the trooper's years, counted what its own inclusion rule allowed, and the era's inclusion rule is unrecovered. Whether Nebraska's printed totals already omitted certified road suicides is unknown, and the book does not guess. An honest exclusion is still an exclusion: the planner who reads the traffic count reads a count with a door in it, and the door has a label, and the label is the standard's word, deliberate intent.

One ledger arrived decades late, and its design matters. Nebraska joined the National Violent Death Reporting System in 2016, federally funded from 2017, and the state program says it works closely with the coroners and county attorneys and reaches most applicable deaths across the ninety-three counties. The system's design is the interesting thing: it takes separate manner entries from the death certificate, the coroner's report, and the police report, then assigns its own manner from the three. It is the only ledger built to notice when the other ledgers disagree, and it gathers that disagreement through the

same county attorneys who serve as coroners. A death coded as undetermined enters it by design. What an accident-coded road death does inside it is a question the deliberation weighs later, because the answer decides how much of the trooper's category any surveillance can see. The system is young, its reach is the state's own claim, and its premise is the book's premise, stated in code: that a violent death is known by more than one paper, and that the papers can disagree.

The last two stations stand apart from the state's design. A county weekly records what the courthouse said, in the words the courthouse made available, and the first chapter's formula lives there; the three words were the tree's fruit in public. The insurer's file is the one ledger that answers to a contract, and money turns on the manner there, so the insurer reads the certificate the way a creditor reads a signature. What an insurer does with a manner it doubts is a question I could not answer: whether a certificate's manner ever controlled an insurer's decision, no record I found says. Both ledgers matter enormously to the families, and both lie outside the counting.

Walk the tree back down and the shape of the thing finally shows. The crash report could carry suspicion in its narrative and coded nothing; the certificate carried manner, signed by a prosecutor. A named code waited in the vital ledger from 1979, and the traffic census excused the death by definition. The surveillance system arrived late and reads the others. Each ledger is honest about what it is, and the silences are three different silences: a missing box, an unused code, an open door. No one of the three silences is a falsehood, and each has its own owner. The missing box belongs to the form's designers. The unused code belongs to everyone who never asked the vital ledger what it held. And the open door belongs to the definition's builders, who wrote the exclusion honestly and meant it.

An honest machine can still lose a truth, if the truth never had a column. The design's silences sit exactly where the trooper's category lived. Whether the design hid anything in Nebraska is a question of what the ledger shows, and that is later work by deliberate order, because a design has to be proved before its products can be read.

The word the whole machine rested on was itself manufactured, and fairly recently. When the car arrived, the deaths it caused needed a category, and the category the country built was the accident: the death no one meant, the cost of speed, the price of modernity. Peter Norton's history of the motor age, Fighting Traffic, tells the making as standard scholarship tells it. The street had belonged to everyone; the car took it. The deaths that followed were reclassified in the public mind by the institutions that needed the road to be blameless: the motoring lobbies and the safety councils. Their campaigns taught the pedestrian to be the problem and taught the language to call the death an accident. A child run down in a city street could be filed, at last, as no one's fault. The word's retreat, when it came, was conditional and late. In 2016 the Associated Press changed its stylebook entry to accept both accident and crash, and to warn that when negligence is claimed or proven, accident should be avoided, because accident can be read as exonerating. Claimed or proven: the warning governs the cases where someone can say what happened. The trooper's cases were the other kind, where no one could. And the formula the county weeklies printed sat outside the warning's reach anyway, because driver lost control claims no negligence and denies none. A sentence can be safe from the stylebook by being empty.

What the country counted, then, was real, and the counting began in 1975, and it was never designed to hold him. Every death in the era's annual reports walked this same tree. When

the counting began is the only part with a clean answer. Where a death can leave the ledgers took a tree to answer: out of the crash form's codes, into the certificate's manner box, past the vital ledger's waiting code, through the traffic census's door. The form that ends the path today is dated and on the record, the July 2021 revision, with its dropdown and its six values: natural, suicide, accident, homicide, pending investigation, could not be determined. The form of the trooper's era is unseen, and no one can say what its box said. Today's box is a fact. The era's box is a silence. Between the fact and the silence sits the era's practice: unrecoverable as design, inferable only from what the design allowed. What would settle the silence is an era certificate or an era manual, and the search for one found none in the records I could reach. The pair of them, the dated document and the unseen one, is where this chapter rests. A later chapter will rest on the same pair, when the car has learned to remember and the box is still the box.

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Chapter Three

Speeding Up to Slow Down

The document is a definition page. This chapter had meant to open on a manual from the trooper's own years, one of the standard texts a Nebraska investigator of 1968 or 1978 would have learned from. No such manual was recovered; I searched and say so. The absence costs the chapter its first exhibit, and the cost is stated in the open: the era's vocabulary is inferred here from the profession's public descriptions, and the current text anchors the terms. What I have read at the page is the seventh edition of the Manual on Classification of Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents. Its definition pages, printed at 18 and 19, are where any reading of a crash begins: what an accident is, what a harmful event is, and what deliberate intent excludes. The three definitions do their work in order, and order matters on a definition page. The accident is the event without deliberate intent; the harmful event is the moment the damage starts; and the deliberate-intent family stands outside both. There is a quiet irony in the standard's plain title: a manual on the classification of accidents spends its early pages on what an accident is not. A page like that is the right place to start a chapter about reading, because every investigator's reading of a scene ends, eventually, at a page like it, in the box the scene gets filed under. The question of this chapter is narrower and harder than the standard's. What can a road tell an investigator about what a driver meant, and where does the telling stop? The trooper's claim, the certifier's folder, and the verdict this book owes all stand on the answer.

In the trooper's years the reading was done by men, at night, with simple tools. A tape, a camera, a notebook, a flashlight.

The scene often waited for daylight: the two a.m. departure was found when the country woke, and the marks kept, and the night's testimony was the road's alone. The waiting had its own cost. Between the death and the discovery the scene cooled, and whatever the night had known about the driver stayed with the night. The investigator walked the scene before the tow took it, because the tow erased it. He marked what the road had kept: where the car left the lane, what it struck, where it came to rest, what marks the tires had laid down. His training came from the institutes and the manuals, and his skill came from repetition, from scene after scene on the same hundred miles. By the end he could read most scenes at a glance, the way a farmer reads a sky. The question this chapter asks is where that reading runs out, and the answer matters for everything the trooper believed, because his claim was a reading of minds made from a reading of roads.

Follow the scene's evidence into the chain the second chapter walked, because the reading does not stop at the ditch. The tow takes the car; the funeral home takes the body. The report goes to the courthouse with its measured marks and its narrative space, and the coroner's physician answers the cause, and the prosecutor selects the manner, and the weekly prints the formula. Every stage of that chain trusted the reading of the scene, and the reading of the scene was honest and skilled and limited in a way nobody at any stage was paid to notice. The photographs showed the wreck, and the wreck showed the road's story; the file closed; the weekly printed its three words. The track was read correctly, and the officer's prose carried it into the file. It said nothing about the mind. The chain worked exactly as designed, and the design had no station where the mind's evidence could enter.

What the road keeps is the first thing to know. A car that

brakes hard leaves a skid, the straight friction mark of a locked wheel. The length of it can be walked back into a speed, because the physics of friction is old and reliable and the manuals teach it: measure the mark, know the surface, and the arithmetic gives a range. That range is honest about itself, a spread and never a point, because the surface changes and the tires change and the estimate carries its assumptions on its face. The scene offers other physical facts as well: the debris field, the damage pattern, the rest position, the gouges in the shoulder. Each can be read, and courts have relied on such readings for a century. None of them reaches the hand's intention. A car that turns too fast leaves a yaw, the side-scuffed arc of a tire being dragged sideways, and the arc's radius walks back into a speed as well. A car that wanders leaves nothing so eloquent: a drift, a gradual departure, the track of a lane quietly abandoned, the sign of a wheel held loosely or not at all. These are the profession's own terms, stated here at the level the profession describes them publicly, and what matters for this book is what the marks say about the driver. A skid says the driver saw the end coming and fought it. A yaw says the driver entered something too fast and struggled. And an empty road, no skid, no yaw, says one of three things, and the three are the trooper's three, the ones his suspicion had to outvote. They are not the exhaustive set, and the book says so once: a heart stops, a seizure takes the wheel, a deer comes through the windshield, and the countries' own classifications carry a natural-death row for exactly those. The three are the ambiguous three, the ones the scene cannot sort, and the sorting is the problem. What the road never records is the hand's intention on the wheel. It records the wheel. The whole of this book lives in the difference between those two sentences.

The three things have three drivers, and they leave one track. A sleeping driver does not brake. His signature, at pattern

level, is the drift with no correction, the car that leaves its lane and keeps leaving it. His hours are the last ones before dawn, on the straight roads that asked nothing of him until they asked everything. A drunk driver often does not brake either; impairment's track is the erratic track until it is no track at all, and drink was the era's standing explanation for a lone night crash, which was often true and always easy. Each of the three drivers leaves a different residue for the certifier who looks. The drunk leaves the bar and the blood. For the sleeper it is the schedule and the shift. For the intender it is the note and the history, when anyone gathers them. And a driver who means the crash does not brake, because braking is the gesture of a person who wants to live. The planners' own reports, heard at pattern level later in this book, say the empty road was considered for exactly this quality: it looks like misfortune. That absent skid mark is the scene's one eloquence, and it is eloquent in three directions at once. The skeptic's advantage is the base rate: sleepers and drunks outnumber the intending on any road, and the thirteenth chapter weighs that advantage honestly, with the government's own figures. Here it is enough that all three drivers are common, and that the scene cannot sort them. Everything the trooper believed he was seeing, everything a skeptic would answer, and everything the certifier had to decide, all of it stands in the space where a skid mark is not.

There is a profession whose whole claim is reading such scenes, and its institutions date themselves precisely. The Northwestern institute that trained generations of crash investigators was founded in 1936, in Evanston, and it is the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety now, renamed in 2000. It drew investigators from across the country, and its graduates carried the method back to the patrols and sheriffs' offices of the plains. The field, in other words, is four decades

older than the federal crash census. That expertise existed throughout the trooper's era; it existed in the institute's classrooms and in the state patrol's own training, and it did not reach the rural courthouse where the manner was decided. The Accreditation Commission for Traffic Accident Reconstruction, the body that credentials the reconstructors, was incorporated in 1991. The profession is real, mathematical, and honest about its materials. Its procedure, described as a procedure, is this: measure the marks, fix the rest positions, photograph the surface, work the physics backward, and state a range with its assumptions attached. Given the marks, the vehicle, the road, and the rest positions, a reconstructor can state speeds and paths with courtroom confidence. Accreditation exists to keep that discipline: the credentialed reconstructor states what the physics shows and declines the rest. The hiring tells its own story. Reconstruction was work for lawsuits and prosecutions, for the disputed crash with a living defendant or a solvent insurer. A lone death on a county road, with no one to sue and no one to charge, commissioned none on the record this book holds. The era's best instrument was reserved for the era's least typical case, and the trooper's cases, the ambiguous ones, the ones that ended a family, were read by eye at the scene and filed. What the profession cannot do, in the ordinary case, is read the driver's mind out of the track. The physics records behavior. Intent is not behavior; intent is the reason for the behavior, and the reason leaves no mark.

This book states the next sentence as its own argued claim: I argue it from everything the record shows, and I cite no one for it. Physical evidence rules intent in only when something beyond the track survives. A note survives. A statement to a family member survives. So does a prior attempt, a diagnosis, a phone call on the way out of town, a witnessed swerve, a survivor's ac-

count. The claim has two halves, and both matter. Where something beyond the track survives, the physical evidence can confirm it, contradict it, or fix its time. Where nothing beyond the track survives, the track is all there is, and the track is three drivers at once. It can rule intent out no better than it can rule intent in. The ordinary lone fatal crash on an empty road leaves exactly that: a track. The era's files rarely held anything beyond it, because no one's job was to gather what lay beyond it. So the physical evidence, in the ordinary case, decides nothing about intent, and the ordinary case was the trooper's claim, which is why his claim must be tested in the literature and the ledgers and never at the scene.

That symmetry deserves its own sentence, because the courthouse forgot it: in the ordinary case the track cannot carry the suicide reading, and it cannot carry the accident reading either. Both verdicts, reached from the track alone, are inferences past the evidence. The difference is that only one of them was ever asked to prove itself. One was the default, the reading that required no argument; the other required a case no rural county was built to make. The track's silence was thus not neutral in practice. It elected the accident, every time the folder was thin, which was nearly every time.

The trooper's answer to that asymmetry was the only one available to him: he had the repetition, and the certifier did not. One man met the silence once per folder and folded it into the default; the other met it two hundred times, and it stopped looking like silence to him. That is not a proof, and this book does not present it as one. It is the reason his suspicion was not a fantasy, and the reason it could never, by itself, be more than a suspicion.

This chapter's concession belongs on the page before any reviewer writes it. Sometimes the scene can tell. A car that ac-

celerates steadily through a hazard it should have survived says something a drifting car does not. A witnessed event, a surviving passenger, a camera, a diary, a history of attempts: any of these can carry intent into the file, and the classification literature is built from cases where they did. In the trooper’s era and on his roads, the camera was rare, the diary rarer, and the witness nearly hypothetical. They are rarer at two in the morning than at noon, and rarer on a county road than at an intersection, which is part of why the trooper’s category lived where it lived. Later in this book the car itself becomes a witness, with a dated rule and a memory measured in seconds, and that changes what the scene can say; the change is real, and it belongs to the seventeenth chapter. Here the concession is smaller and older: the scene sometimes tells, and I concede the sometimes gladly, because the sometimes is what an honest reading owes. And the ordinary case is still ordinary. On the trooper’s roads, in his years, the witnesses were mile markers, the passengers were absent, and the recorders were a generation away.

Even before intent enters, the lone crash is the hardest reading in the whole taxonomy, and it earns a paragraph of plain procedure. A two-car crash supplies two stories: two tracks, two rest positions, often a survivor, sometimes a witness, and the one story disciplines the other. The surviving driver is evidence with a voice, and the lone crash has none. A lone crash supplies one track and no voice. The fixed object the state files it under is the state’s own category, fixed object, overturn, other noncollision, the taxonomy of the era’s annual reports. That category holds the tree, the abutment, the embankment, the rollover in the ditch, without ever asking why the car arrived: the taxonomy filed the shape without reading it. The overturn is the category’s quietest member: a car that rolls leaves a long untidy scene that still says nothing about the hand on the wheel.

Add the trooper's conditions: a hundred miles between towns, a highway hypnosis of straight lines, speeds that forgive nothing, and a darkness with no one in it. Read the scene honestly and the scene answers everything except the question. That is not a failure of the investigator. It is the limit of the instrument.

What the certifier is told to seek, when the question of suicide is asked at all, is the one statement of criteria this book prints. It is printed as criteria, in the investigator's voice, because the book's argument needs it and for no other reason. The 1988 operational criteria came from a federal working group of coroners, medical examiners, statisticians, and public-health officials, and I read them at the page. They set two elements: the death must arise from an act the person inflicted on himself, and there must be evidence of intent to die. The working group existed because certification varied wildly from state to state and county to county, which is the group's own abstract's finding, and the criteria were its answer. The certifier's own professional guide, the medical examiners' manual of 2002, makes accident or undetermined the proper finding when suicide would be speculation, and the seventh chapter carries its standard. A verdict without criteria is a mood, and the criteria's whole purpose was to keep the verdict from being one. That evidence, the criteria say, can be explicit or implicit, and no written note is required in every case. Implicit evidence is the kind the living supply: the preparations, the affairs set in order, the statements that read differently afterward, the history of attempts or illness, the crisis of the week before.

The Swedish road criteria descend from Ovenstone's Edinburgh criteria of 1973, by way of a European railway agency's adaptation, and the wording is now in hand from the transport agency's own report of 2014, read at its tables. The criteria are screening rules, and the distinction is the book's own safeguard

printed by the country that built it. A case is selected for investigation because a farewell, a history, or the event itself gives grounds for suspicion, and the final classification is a separate act. A case selected on suspicion can finish anywhere: probable suicide, undetermined, probable accident, established accident. Only the top two grades enter the suicide statistics. The suspicion opens the inquiry; it does not close it. The investigator's version of all of it is this: read the scene for what it can prove, then ask the living for what the scene cannot. Evidence of intent lives with the living. The track can only refuse to contradict it. That asking has a method of its own, an interview of the grieving that a later chapter watches being invented, and it is enough here that the method existed in print while the trooper worked. It also has a social cost, and a small county prices it honestly. Someone must sit in a widow's kitchen and ask whether her husband meant it. No one in the design was paid to run that errand, and everyone in the design knew what the errand would cost the asker in a town where everyone eats at the same café. The criteria assumed an asker. The trooper's state did not appoint one.

Against that, set the state's own instruction to the body, because the hinge of this chapter, and one of the hinges of the book, is a statute about testing. From 1974, under LB 66, carried today at section 60-6,102, Nebraska required the coroner to examine a driver who died within four hours of a crash, and a pedestrian sixteen or older. Tests were made for the presence and concentration of alcohol and drugs. The results went to the state, tabulated monthly, identity sealed. The design is exact: the dead driver's body would be tested, by mandate, for the one thing chemistry can measure. Its four-hour line made the scene's first hours matter in law, and the law's hours were about chemistry alone. The mandate's aim was the state's drink-

ing problem, and its instrument was the dead. There is a strange mercy in that, and the book marks it without mocking it: the one standing order to examine the dead driver at all, in the trooper's era, was issued in the service of counting drink. The design legislated what it could measure. Intent it could not measure, and intent it did not legislate. Whether the mandate was carried out in the rural counties, where the coroner was a prosecutor and the laboratory was a hundred miles away, is unrecorded; the book says so. What the mandate never ordered was a test for intent, because no such test exists. The state ordered the one test that never touches it.

Hold the two instruments side by side and the era's failure shows. The track could not speak intent. The blood could not speak intent. And the criteria existed, in print, from 1973 in Edinburgh and from 1988 in Washington, and the criteria's one workable instruction was to ask the living, and no one in the design was charged with asking. A rural county had no psychological autopsy tradition and no reconstruction budget; it had a prosecutor with a folder. The trooper's silhouette, the man alone at full cruise on an empty road, was speeding up, in effect, to slow down, permanently. His scene could be read as sleep, as drink, or as intent, with equal fidelity and equal proof. The certification of such a death was a choice made at a courthouse, by a prosecutor, from a folder. The criteria for making it honestly existed in print, on another continent and in a federal journal. What did not exist in the county at all was the machinery to gather the evidence those criteria require. Between the scene and the signature stood a few days and a folder, and no procedure in the design filled them with questions. And the one instrument that might have supplied it, the autopsy, cost the county money it seldom spent. In the trooper's era no autopsy mandate existed for an adult at all, and the state's only public

autopsy facility, the Douglas County morgue in Omaha, was built in 2018, decades after he left the road. What a county ordered, it paid for, and the record of what rural counties ordered is the fourth chapter's subject.

There is one thing the trooper could see that no certifier could, and I will give it room, because it is the strongest honest version of his claim. He had the repetition. The certifier saw one folder at a time; the trooper saw twenty years of scenes, and a pattern across twenty years is real information of a kind. It is the kind that cannot survive a courtroom, because no single scene carries it, and it is the kind that should have been research, because a pattern across scenes is exactly what a study is. A study needs someone to collect the scenes, and the collecting is what the journals of his own years were doing elsewhere, in Los Angeles and Baltimore and Edinburgh, on the record, while he collected his in memory. What those places had, and his counties lacked, was a medical examiner with a staff, a research center with a telephone, and a journal that would print the result. His notebook was the ditches; the ditches kept showing him the same shape, and the shape had nowhere else to live. This book treats his repetition as evidence that the question was askable, and never as proof of the answer. The difference between those two is the difference between his whisper and the journals, and the journals get the next movement.

One rule of this book governs this chapter hardest, and the chapter says it in its own voice, in the open. The dead stay at pattern level here. The marks are read the way an investigator reads them, and the reading stops where the investigator stops. No passage in this chapter, or in this book, describes how a crash is arranged; no speed is recommended, no road, no object; nothing here is a portrait of an act being planned. The criteria appear once, as criteria, because a reader cannot judge a ver-

dict without knowing what evidence a verdict can rest on. They appear nowhere else; the thirteenth and seventeenth chapters point back to this statement and never repeat it. The book's audit asks whether any sequence of chapters leaves the impression that concealment is achievable. A later chapter justifies this rule from the evidence of what stories do; here it is obeyed without argument. The counter-evidence is carried in the open: investigations frequently do find intent, in notes, in histories, in prior attempts, and now in the car's own memory. If a vulnerable reader ever opens this book, what it offers them is the opposite of a method: the scene does not hide anything well, because the living can always be asked, and the car now remembers besides.

The ordinary case, then, is this. A road at two in the morning, a track with no skid, a fixed object in the state's taxonomy, a body tested for drink and never for meaning, a certifier with a folder and a box. The road told the investigator everything it could by two in the morning, and what it could not tell was the only thing that mattered. The trooper read such scenes for twenty years and learned their shape, and this book trusts his reading of the track completely. He earned that much, ditch by ditch, on his knees in the gravel, in the dark, with the trucks going by. What it tests is his reading of the mind, which is the part no track can carry. What a road can tell an investigator is everything about the event and nothing about the meaning, and the telling stops at the track's end. Physical evidence rules intent in only when something beyond the track survives, and the state ordered the one test that never touches it. That is the finding this chapter leaves on the table. Picture a bridge abutment somewhere east of the county line, and the picture is this chapter's, labeled as one. Let it have taken three impacts in living memory, one for each kind of driver this chapter has carried. The concrete keeps no record of what any of the three meant. It

stands where the road bends, a fact the road keeps, indifferent to which of the three drivers found it, while the paperwork decides the rest. The trooper's question outlived his years on that road, and it is still being answered badly. A bridge does not care, and the paperwork does not wonder, and somewhere between the two of them the answer is still being decided the old way. The telling stopped at the track's end, as it always stops, and the rest of this book is about what the paperwork did with the silence. The thirteenth chapter disciplines the trooper's proportion against the government's figures; this chapter's finding stands beside it, and it is the one the track already gave.

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Chapter Four

The Courthouse

The document is a statute page. It reads like a deed to an office no one wanted, the transfer recorded in the source line, where a deed would have a signature block. Nebraska Revised Statutes section 23-1210, as the Legislature's own site prints it, makes the county attorney the county coroner, in one plain sentence that a century of practice has never complicated. Under the text sits the source line, the bookkeeper's trail of where the rule has been, and this book reads source lines the way it reads verdicts, because they are the same kind of evidence. Laws 1915, chapter 224, section 1, page 493. The Legislature's own 2009 study says 1917 where the source line says 1915, and the book notices the disagreement and keeps the source line: the act was passed in 1915, whatever year its provisions took hold. Then the compiled statutes of 1922 and 1929, a 1933 act, the Revised Statutes of 1943, and amendments in 1957, 1981, 1987, and 1996. A compilation restates the law; an amendment changes it; the trail holds both kinds, and the dates of each kind are kept apart. The arrangement is not a fossil anyone dug up. It is a working rule, amended into the present tense across a century, and the page is the current page, the rule a living prosecutor works under this week. Its trail begins in 1915, which is the date this book uses; the 1943 date the article gave was the year of a compilation, and the error is corrected in the open. The trooper worked under the rule as the 1957 amendment left it, mid-trail, one version in a century of versions, all of them the prosecutor's. The later entries are the rule's upkeep: 1957, 1981, 1987, 1996, small repairs

to a standing arrangement, each one proof that the Legislature looked at the rule that year and kept it.

What the 1915 act did was abolish the separately elected coroner and hand the duties to the county's prosecutor. That act's own text, its title, and any preamble it carried were not recovered, so if the Legislature stated its reason in law, the statement waits in the session laws, unread by me. The coroner was an old office Nebraska had inherited with its statehood: an elected county officer with a jury at his call, descended from the English office that had been viewing the bodies of the dead since the twelfth century. It folded him into the newer office and moved on. Why the Legislature did so is unrecovered with it: the journals and the sponsors are unreached, and the book says so. The motive this book prints belongs to the journalists who found it. As the Flatwater Free Press's investigation of January 2025 reports it, in its own words, the Legislature abolished the elected coroners to save money. The economy explanation has the ring of the Nebraska of that year, a young state running cheap government across ninety-three sparse counties on purpose, and the book attributes it to the investigation and goes no further. A reason can be plausible and unproved at once, and this one is both.

The arrangement was challenged at once, and the challenge is the book's luck, because it put the design on the record. A coroner sued, and the case is State ex rel. Crosby v. Moorhead, 100 Nebraska 298, 159 Northwestern Reporter 412, decided in 1916. Crosby is named here only as the caption names him; who he was and which county he served are unrecovered. His argument, as the 2025 investigation summarizes it, was that county attorneys could not give the work proper attention. The Nebraska Supreme Court upheld the section, reading it as incorporating the existing coroner's duties into the county attorney's

office. The office survived, in other words, by being swallowed. Its duties continued inside the prosecutor's with the law's full blessing: the viewing of the body, the calling of the jury, the signing of the record, all of them now the prosecutor's errands, all of them carried on his terms. The case sits on the statute page today as an annotation, the warning preserved forever beside the rule it failed to stop. The prosecutor has ruled on the dead in Nebraska ever since, in every one of the ninety-three counties. And the man who warned against the arrangement in 1916 has been right for a hundred and ten years without anyone having to say so.

The machine the act built is worth walking part by part. Each part was built to do something, and none of them was built to ask what a driver meant. The coroner, who is the county attorney, holds the duty. A coroner's physician, under section 23-1820, certifies the cause of death in every death an attending physician cannot certify, and performs an autopsy when the coroner requests one. He is a local doctor with a statutory errand, a family physician with a county appointment, and the design asks him for cause and nothing else. An inquest, under section 23-1801, may be summoned for a death supposed to have occurred by unlawful means, with a jury of six residents. The statute is stated here at its own width, and whether any inquest was ever held for a lone crash is unrecorded. His deaths were never supposed unlawful, because supposing required evidence and no one was charged with gathering it. So the one instrument that could have asked the question in public leaves no record of its use inside the statute books. And the coroner may delegate the viewing of bodies and the serving of papers to the sheriff or any peace officer, under an amendment added in 1987, so even the looking can be deputized. And there is no state medical examiner. There has never been one. No appointed physician with

statewide duty, no office whose only work is the dead, no laboratory of the state's own, no specialist the county attorney must call. Every other part of the machine has a name and a section number. The absence has none, and it is the largest part.

Walk the trooper's midnight crash through this machine at the width of the statutes, because the walk is the chapter's point. The trooper works the scene and files his report; the funeral home takes the body and starts the certificate. The coroner, who is the county attorney, receives the folder. Its physician certifies the cause, which the wreck makes easy, because the crushed chest reads the same in any office. And the manner, where the mind would have to be read, is the county attorney's to select. The inquest is his to summon or not, six residents called to a public hearing, the design's one instrument for asking in the open, and it is limited to deaths supposed unlawful, and nothing in the folder supposes anything. And the 1974 act has ordered the blood drawn and the chemistry counted, the report to the Department of Motor Vehicles within ten days. Every step is lawful, and every step is complete, and nowhere in it did anyone's duty include the asking of the trooper's question. The prosecutor signed, because the pen was his, and the pen was his because the Legislature had given it to him, for the reason the 2025 investigation reports in its own words. The machine did not fail that night. It ran perfectly, and it produced an accident, because an accident is what the machine was built to produce when the evidence is thin and the family is grieving and the town is small. No one in the courthouse that week had done anything wrong, and that is the point this chapter exists to make: the failure, where there was one, was the design's, and it was designed in 1915. That is the finding the design permits, and the rest of the book asks how often it permitted it.

What the crash left behind in that courthouse was a closed

file and an open secret, and both of them kept. The courthouse of that era is the same courthouse now, the same office, the same statute's descendant, the same drawer of forms, and the file from that night is still in it, still saying accident, forever. The certificate said accident, and the certificate was lawful, and the certificate may have been true. It is the permanent record of that night, and nothing in the design ever reopened it, and no one moved to amend it, and no one was charged with wondering whether to. The family received a story it could carry to church. The county weekly printed its three words. And the insurer opened a file of its own, and that file closed too, and what the certificate's manner meant to the insurer, this book could not find anyone to say. And the trooper drove home with the one thing the machine had no station for, his doubt, which belonged to him alone and which the paperwork never once asked about in twenty years. The file closed. The doubt worked. That is the division of labor this book indicts, and the indictment is of the design, and never of the men who ran it honestly inside the design's limits.

For the county attorney himself, the death duty is one line in a prosecutor's working week. The week deserves a paragraph at pattern level, because the census measured the world it happens in. In the counties along the trooper's stretch of Interstate 80, the seats ran from 3,120 people to 33,180 in the 1980 census, and in Deuel County the whole county held 2,462. The county attorney there prosecuted the bad checks and the bar fights, advised the county board, and answered to voters he met at the café. A death arrived the way weather arrives, unscheduled. He handled it with what he had: the trooper's report, the funeral home's call, the coroner's physician on the telephone, with specialists a long way off and costing money the county had not budgeted. His training was the law; medicine was no part of

it, and until 2009 the state required no training of him for this duty at all. Every four years the voters judged him, on the prosecutions they could see, and never on the deaths, which they could not. He was not negligent in this; he was exactly what the statutes described, a lawyer holding a coroner's duty because the law said so, in an office of one or two lawyers, with the death arriving between the prosecutions. The trooper and the county attorney knew each other, the way the two halves of a county's law know each other, and each understood exactly what the other's office could not do. The design assumed the county attorney would do it well because he was local, and the design's critics have spent a century answering that local is the problem.

One more part arrived late, and it is the part the trooper's midnight crash would have met had it crashed a quarter century later. In 1999 the state mandated an autopsy for any person under nineteen who dies a sudden death, at section 23-1824, with an exemption for death by trauma resulting from an accident, absent suspicious circumstances. The bill was LB 46, Senator Brashear's, approved March 3. The floor transcript of February 3, 1999, shows the exemption arriving as a committee amendment that narrowed the bill. A 2006 amendment later ordered the Attorney General to issue guidelines on child autopsies by July 1, 2007; the guidelines' own document is unrecovered, and the exemption stands. A later state review put one part of the capacity problem on the record. Nebraska's 2011 report on child deaths in 2007 and 2008 described rural scene investigations as frequently inadequate. It called for training, wider use of the existing protocol, and regional expertise. That finding concerns children, and a later period. It cannot supply the missing record of the trooper's adult crashes, and the book says so. In the trooper's years there was no autopsy mandate for

anyone, at any age. The mandate that exists now covers children and excuses the highway. The pairing tells on its authors: the road's kind is the common kind, and the common kind is the one the counties cannot afford to open. When the Legislature finally ordered one kind of death opened, it wrote the road's exception into the same sentence. That pairing of mandate and exemption is the design's logic stated in its own words: the accident is filed unopened, and the phrase that does the filing is the statute's own. The exemption carries its own exception, suspicious circumstances, and the suspicion is the coroner's to judge, and the coroner is the prosecutor, and the circle closes. Every safeguard in the design passes through the same office, which is the design's strength for the budget and the design's weakness for the question.

How the office worked in the trooper's era is unrecorded, and the book says so plainly, because the one voice the record holds comes from 2008. An interim study of the Legislature, LR 276, a study of standards and oversight of death investigations in Nebraska, was compiled in January 2009 and presented that March. The study was Senator Pete Pirsch's, and he then carried the reform bill in the same session; the study and the bill were one senator's answer to one newspaper series. An interim study is the Legislature's way of looking at its own machinery between sessions, and this one looked because a newspaper series had made the machinery visible. The moment produced the training law and left the pen untouched. Its appendices gathered the surveys: one of county attorneys, one of law enforcement, one from 1998. The appendices also reproduce investigation worksheets from local offices, forms that are worksheets and never certificates, evidence that some offices asked more than the state required. In its Appendix D an anonymous county attorney answered the question of review. The words have done

more work in this book than any statute: no one ‘reviews’ the cause or manner of death; law enforcement investigates and the coroner determines. The quotation marks around reviews are the respondent’s own. One respondent, one survey, one year, and the book carries it as exactly that, a single practitioner’s account of practice and nothing wider. It is the only account the record supplies. The absence of any other is itself part of the design’s history. A system with no review is a system that cannot say what it does. And a system that cannot say what it does cannot be asked whether it undercounts despair, which is why the twelfth chapter measures the question on other states’ data instead.

Today the workflow is on paper, or rather on screen. The state’s County Attorney Manual for Filing Death Certificates, in its revision of July 2021, instructs the county attorney at page 10 to select the manner of death from a dropdown list. The manner of a death in Nebraska is now a selection in a data system, and the manual exists to teach the prosecutor how to make it. And the state’s data documentation gives the values: natural, suicide, accident, homicide, pending investigation, could not be determined. Hold the trooper’s category up to that list and the list’s silence shows again. There is suicide, which must be proved. There is accident, which needs no proof. And there is could not be determined, which costs the family nothing except the truth. The whole book is about which of those boxes the folder invited. The prosecutor’s pen holds the manner, in the present tense, by the state’s own manual. What the pen did in 1983 is unrecorded, and the office that held the pen was the same office under the same statute. The 1987 delegation amendment and the 2009 training law are the only structural changes the century made on this record, with the small repairs of 1957, 1981, and 1996 unexamined to the arrangement. The train-

ing law, section 23-1213.03, requires initial death-investigation training within a year of election and continuing education after. Both left the pen where it was.

Nebraska's arrangement is unusual in degree, and it is not unusual in kind, and the objection should be heard in this chapter's voice first. The country has condemned the coroner's office at regular intervals for a century, and the condemnations are the same finding in three generations of type: 1928, 2009, 2025. In 1928 the National Research Council's bulletin The Coroner and the Medical Examiner recommended against the office. The National Academies' 2009 report on forensic science described a fragmented system. A further National Academies report, Strengthening the U.S. Medicolegal Death Investigation System, arrived in 2025. It carries Nebraska as a case study: ninety-three counties, an elected county attorney as ex officio coroner, every death investigation performed by law enforcement, and no medicolegal death investigators anywhere in the state. The fourth chapter's machine is the academies' own exhibit. All three are cited by title at the level of their known recommendations, without page quotation, because I did not read them at the page. The CDC catalogs the arrangement state by state, coroner, medical examiner, mixed, and Nebraska's is one of the arrangements it describes. Fifty states answered the question of who decides fifty ways, and the trooper's category had a different fate in each, because the fate of an ambiguous death is fixed by the geography of the decider.

I considered a count of states by system for this book and dropped it. No current, consistently defined count was verified, and the book does not print one it cannot defend. The county coroner is an American institution before it is a Nebraska eccentricity. This arrangement has its defenders, and their case deserves to be stated fairly before this book's question. The

prosecutor-coroner is cheap, and cheapness is a real virtue in a county of two thousand, where the courthouse budget and the bridge fund compete for the same dollar. He is elected, and so accountable. He is local, and so reachable at two in the morning, when the death happens. And in a county of two thousand he is often the only officer of the law with the authority to act. All of that is true, and all of it is sincerely meant, and none of it answers the question, because the question is not whether the prosecutor-coroner is honest or affordable. The question is what he can see from his desk. What makes Nebraska the clearest specimen is one fact: its decider prosecutes for a living, everywhere, always. The office that decides whether a death was a crime is the office that decides whether it was an accident, and whether that double duty changes the count is one of the two questions this book exists to ask. The two are named here, once, at the machine that answers them. Does a system that leaves intent to a local decider with little investigative capacity and much to answer to undercount despair? And was the mercy, wherever the count ran short, ever the motive? The first has been measured at the level of system type, and the second is what the inquest cannot settle from the outside. No accusation is made against any man who held the office, here or anywhere in this book. The county attorneys of the trooper's era did their lawful duty as the design described it, and most of them did it conscientiously, and the design's question survives their conscientiousness, because it was never about them. It is about what any of us would do with a folder that proved nothing, in a town where the widow was someone we knew. The design's assumption is that we would all be braver than the record shows.

The state has considered changing the machine, on the record, three times, and the third time is the instructive one. The bills now have names in the record. In 1980, LB 222, spon-

sored by the LR 158 Study Committee and styled as a state coroner's office, failed to advance for engrossment on March 19 and was indefinitely postponed on April 18, its appropriation bill postponed with it. In 1999, Senator Brashear introduced LB 316, the Post-Mortem Examinations Act, to replace the county arrangement; it sat in the Judiciary Committee at the session's end and appears among the indefinitely postponed bills in the next year's disposition index. The fates are the journals' own, printed at their pages. The reason is the 2025 investigation's: it attributes the failures to cost concerns, and the book attributes the reason to the investigation and goes no further, because a disposition index records what happened and not why. The failure's shape is known anyway: the specialist lost to the bill for his salary.

In February 2008 the Omaha World-Herald ran Karyn Spencer's series Fatal Flaws, three days of it, from February 24 to 26, cited here from the LR 276 bibliography. That series found that 27 percent of coroner-handled deaths were autopsied in 2000 to 2004, a figure this book attributes to the series and does not reconcile. And in January 2009 Senator Pete Pirsch introduced LB 671, which as introduced directed a region-based state medical examiner system built on certified forensic pathologists as regional consultants. The design was conservative, even modest: keep the counties, add the specialists, give the rural coroner a pathologist to call. As enacted, the bill kept its other reforms: death-investigation guidelines, voluntary regional networks, standardized forms, and initial and continuing training for coroners. The medical-examiner mandate was gone. Who removed it, and why, the bill comparison alone cannot say; the text changed, and the motive is unrecorded here. The bill passed 47 to 0, with two not voting, on May 21, 2009, and was approved May 27. Nebraska voted

unanimously for reform and kept the prosecutor. Three attempts across three decades, and the pattern is the finding: the medical examiner loses on cost, and the pen survives. The guidelines are written, the networks are voluntary, the forms are standardized, the training is required. And the manner of a death in a rural county still belongs to the prosecutor, because the reform reformed everything around the pen and never touched the pen.

And the present machinery, then, stands like this at the level of design. The prosecutor is coroner in all ninety-three counties. The state's only public autopsy facility is the Douglas County morgue in Omaha, at about $2,500 an autopsy, a price a small county feels. Bodies are sent to it from as far as Scotts Bluff County, which is to say across most of the state's considerable width. In Hooker County, the county attorney had not ordered an autopsy in thirty years, as the 2025 investigation reported it. The training law dates to 2009. And the two autopsy rates the public record holds sit side by side without reconciliation. The 2008 series found 27 percent of coroner-handled deaths autopsied in 2000 to 2004; the 2025 investigation found about 12.5 percent over six later years. No one has reconciled their denominators, and this book draws no line between them. The training law arrived between the two windows, and the second rate is lower, and this book does not claim the training caused anything, because the denominators were never reconciled. It prints them both, dated and sourced, and leaves the gap where the record left it.

One more date belongs in this chapter, because it is the date Nebraska's uniqueness may have become absolute. Washington State ended the same arrangement by statute, Laws of Washington 2021, chapter 127, passed as HB 1326. Its Attorney General's Opinion 2024 No. 3, of August 22, 2024, confirmed that

from January 1, 2025, a prosecutor cannot be appointed coroner to recreate it. The statute changed the arrangement; the opinion analyzed it; the two are kept apart, because an enactment and an interpretation are different instruments. The opinion's care is worth a sentence of its own: it was asked whether the prohibition could be evaded by appointment, and it answered, carefully, that it could not. A handful of Washington counties had run the arrangement until then, and a few New York counties were in the process of switching, as the 2025 investigation reported. The arrangement was ending everywhere it had survived, and Nebraska was not ending it. After that date, Nebraska's ninety-three counties may be the last jurisdictions in the country where the elected prosecutor always rules on the dead. May be: the count of arrangements is the CDC's catalog, and the claim is printed at the width of the record.

What the machine was built to do, it does: cheap, local, accountable to neighbors, finished by Friday. What it was never built to do is ask the trooper's question. The kind of system this is has been measured against the other kinds, and the twelfth chapter carries the measurement. Here the finding is the machine itself, every part of it, when each part was built, what each was built to do, and who selects the manner today. The last phrase belongs to the statute books, because they wrote the design's signature before anyone signed a certificate under it. The child-autopsy law's exemption covers death by trauma resulting from an accident. Trauma resulting from an accident. Five words that close the file before the file is opened, the arrangement in a single phrase, printed in 1999 and operative in spirit since 1915. It is the first of this book's epigraphs, because the design, once, said its own name out loud. The phrase waited on the page for the trooper's midnight crash, and the crash never needed it, because in his years the file closed itself. There was

no mandate for the exemption to excuse; no mandate reached an adult at all. That is the arrangement the trooper's claim ran against, and it is still the arrangement; the page is still there. The reader now knows every part of it: when each part was built, what each was built to do, whose hand holds the pen today. And whose hand held it in 1983, and what it cost him to hold it.

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Movement II. The Witnesses

Chapter Five

What the Journals Knew

A citation is proof of existence with a date on it, and this chapter's claim is about what existed. The proof comes first. In 1960, in the American Sociological Review, as the 2024 systematic review lists it, Austin Porterfield published a paper titled Traffic Fatalities, Suicide, and Homicide. It is the earliest paper the review lists for this question, the first mark in the right-hand column, the year the trooper's era and the question's era began at once. That is what I hold of it: the author, the title, the journal, the year, as a later review's reference list records them. The volume and pages were not reached, the text was not read, and no sentence of it is quoted here. The journal was the flagship of American sociology, and the title's nerve deserves a slow reading. It did not ask whether traffic fatalities might be suicides. It set traffic fatalities, suicide, and homicide in one frame, as things that travel together, and it asked why. Porterfield worked at Texas Christian University, and a later thesis there confirms the line of work continuing in that department through the middle of the decade. The record is the exhibit: in 1960, at the start of the trooper's twenty years, a sociologist was already asking in print why the road and despair share a map. The paper's title promised the question, and the review's listing of it is the proof the asking started before his career was warm. Nineteen-sixty was the year his ditches began; the interstate was new, the speeds were rising, and the paper was already in print. A citation is a small thing to build a chapter on, and this chapter builds on a row of them, because a row of citations is exactly what a whisper never had. The whisper was true and undoc-

umentable; the row is documented and narrow, and the book takes the narrowness with the documentation, every time.

This chapter's discipline deserves one statement at the front, because the chapter is made of such records. What follows proves contemporaneous recognition and nothing more. They were doctors and coroners and one psychiatrist in Edinburgh, writing in the evenings, worried about the same dead man on the same kind of road, and none of them knew the others were worried. For every work named, I hold the verified citation, the publisher's abstract where one exists, and the 2024 review's reference list and tables. No quotation is drawn from any of them, because quotation requires the page, and the pages are unread by me. Where the review reports a finding, the finding is reported at second hand, in those words, with the review named as the source. A reader who wants any paper at the page can have it; the citations are given in full for exactly that reason, and the tables at the back of the book carry the numbers where the numbers were verified. What this chapter does with them is narrower and stranger: it treats the existence of the asking as the evidence, and the content as a later chapter's work. That is the deal the chapter makes, and it makes the deal once.

The instrument that makes the chapter possible deserves its own introduction, because it is the book's card catalog. In 2024, in Transportation Research Part F, volume 106, pages 14 to 26, Igor Radun, Pragathy Kannan, Timo Partonen, and Keith Hawton published a systematic review of road traffic suicides, open access, and I verified it at its tables. Its own title asks the field's question out loud: do we know enough to propose effective preventive measures? The question behind that question is the book's: whether anyone has been counting the thing the measures would prevent. Sixty-four years after Porterfield, the field itself was still asking whether it knew enough. It gathers fifty-

one studies from eleven countries, twenty-two of them Nordic and sixteen of those Finnish, twenty-seven from the English-speaking countries, thirteen of those American, and two from the German-speaking. A systematic review is a protocol, a survey built by rule: databases searched by rule, studies included and excluded by written criteria, the whole machinery designed to keep the gatherer honest. Sixty-four years of journals, 1960 to 2024, come to order in its tables. This book stands on that order everywhere the movement turns. The review's reference list and tables are the spine of this movement of the book. Its existence is the era's final answer to the trooper's era: the question now has its own systematic review, and the review's answer to its own title is that we do not know enough, because the counting was never done. The trooper's question, it turns out, has been studied for sixty-four years on three continents, and the review is where the studies are lined up. What they found where investigators look belongs to the tenth chapter; what was in print during his years belongs to this one.

The trooper worked his roads from about 1960 to about 1980. Two years in, in 1962, in the American Journal of Psychiatry, volume 119, pages 237 to 240, Melvin Selzer and Charles Payne published Automobile Accidents, Suicide and Unconscious Motivation. The title alone was an accusation, and the citation is verified at the publisher's record. The journal was the profession's own, the place psychiatry talked to itself, and in it two researchers told the profession that some of its crash drivers were depressed and thinking of death. In 1962 that was a claim with a theory attached, the era's confidence that the mind's hidden motives could be read by the trained; the theory would age, and the observation would not. The article this book expands described their finding as depression and suicidal thinking at striking rates among drivers in serious crashes. This book car-

ries the paper at the width of its citation and its title, and lets the title do the work. Unconscious motivation: the phrase belongs to its era's psychology, and the era's psychology was the first to give the trooper's silhouette a clinical home. Two psychiatrists were asking the trooper's question two years into his twenty.

Two years later the same journal, volume 121, pages 366 to 370, carried John Macdonald's Suicide and Homicide by Automobile, five pages that asked the road's two worst deaths apart. The 2024 review reports it as forty cases from his own psychiatric practice, ten of them collisions, and that is reported at second hand; the collisions among them are the trooper's category seen from the consulting room. Forty is what one practice held; it is no one's census, and the quarter of them that were collisions is a handful, and the chapter says so because the sample's size is part of its meaning. The review also quotes a line of Macdonald's about the automobile as an instrument of anger, quoted here at second hand and labeled so: wrecking a car at high speed allows a violent discharge of great anger. The line deserves its second-hand label twice over, because it is a clinician's metaphor from a small practice. It explains the trooper's silhouette without measuring it: the car as the means at hand, the anger as the push, the wreck as the discharge. A metaphor is not a count. It is the era's way of seeing, and the era's way of seeing is what this chapter counts. The review reports, too, a case of his that brushes against method, and the Distance Rule keeps it out of this book. What matters for the record is plainer: a psychiatrist with a practice was treating patients who had done the thing, and he was writing about it, in 1964, while the trooper walked the ditches.

In 1965 the Medico-Legal Bulletin carried M. G. Frank's Suicide in Automobile Accidents, number 147, pages 1 to 4, as the 2024 review lists it. The Bulletin was the Virginia chief medi-

cal examiner's own house organ, which is to say the question had reached the certifiers' own shelf, the place where the people who sign the certificates talked to each other. What they said to each other in it, I cannot quote; that they said it at all, the citation proves. In 1966 the Archives of General Psychiatry, volume 14, pages 60 to 68, carried the Los Angeles group's comparative psychiatric study of accidental and suicidal death. Tabachnick, Litman, and their colleagues, the suicide researchers, compared the two kinds of dead, one group against the other, in print. A comparison is the method's beginning: hold the accidental dead against the suicidal dead and ask what differs, and whatever differs is where a classifier learns to tell them apart. In 1967 the Psychoanalytic Quarterly, volume 36, pages 248 to 259, carried Litman and Tabachnick's Fatal one-car accidents, a paper the 2024 review calls influential, and the review's judgment is reported at second hand. The title is the landmark: the one-car crash, named as a category of death worth its own study, in a journal of psychoanalysis, in the year the trooper turned whatever age a man turns in his seventh year of ditches. By 1967 the one-car crash had its own paper, its own name for the problem in the title itself. The trooper's silhouette had a literature by the time his hair was gray.

Read the row of citations for its shape, because the shape is the second finding. Sociology asked why the two deaths travel together, and its instrument was the survey, and its answer fed the understanding. Psychiatry asked who the driver was, and answered with the clinic, the forty cases from a practice, and its answer fed the treatment. Forensic medicine asked how a certifier tells, and answered with the case review and the bulletin, and its answer should have fed the certification, and the certification is where the trooper's state stood apart. Three professions, three instruments, one death, and the death was the

trooper's: the driver alone at night, dead of a wound the road can explain and no one can prove. Every profession that met the body wrote the question down, and none of them could make a courthouse ask it. The asking was never one field's hobby. It was the same question arriving independently at every profession that touched such a death, which is what happens when a real thing goes uncounted long enough: the people who keep meeting it start writing it down.

One gap in the literature deserves its own sentence, because the trooper lived in it. The record is urban and coastal and clinical: Los Angeles, Baltimore's Maryland, Edinburgh's Scotland, the big cities' practices and hospitals. None of the papers knew his roads. The literature's drivers were city men whose deaths left witnesses and records; his drivers died alone where the nearest witness was a mile of corn, and no paper was written from a place like that. The papers also could not do the one thing his claim needed: they could not certify. All that asking, and not one of the askers held a pen over a manner box. A journal can prove a question exists; only a courthouse can decide what a death was, and the journals had no jurisdiction over a Nebraska certificate. The era's print and the era's practice lived in separate rooms, and the trooper's dead lived in the courthouse's room, and the door between the rooms was the interview of the living, which the courthouse did not have. The question was being asked everywhere except where he worked. That is not a criticism of the journals; it is the shape of the era's evidence, and the book keeps the shape visible because the gap is where his twenty years went. The gap's correction had to wait for the countries that built systems to look, and the tenth chapter gives them the room they earned.

What he was taught is its own short record. The patrol trained him to work the scene, and the era's crash-instruction

tradition was strong, and whether any curriculum anywhere told an officer to consider the driver's intent is unrecorded in what I reached. Its subject was the crash, and the crash's cause was the road or the car or the driver, and the driver's meaning was nobody's lesson. The courthouse had its own print world, the statutes and the manuals and the law reviews, and the journals were not in it. A county attorney could be a diligent reader all his life and never meet the question in print. He came to the question alone, from the scenes, which is exactly how the journals came to it from the clinics. The era had two sets of people meeting the same death, and the two sets never met. There was a postal gap as plain as the geography. The American Journal of Psychiatry went to its subscribers, who were psychiatrists. The sociology journal went to the sociologists. And the county attorney's office on the trooper's stretch subscribed to nothing of the kind, and the nearest medical library was a hundred miles or more from most of his courthouses. Print had a distribution network, and his roads were not on it. The journals were not withheld from him; they never passed through the world he worked in, and no instrument of the era carried them there.

The vocabulary of the asking wandered as much as the asking did, and the wandering is its own evidence. Unconscious motivation, in 1962. Subintentioned death, in 1963, a term the sixth chapter gives its inventor. Vehicular suicide, as the medical examiners would call it. Disguised suicide, as the British Medical Journal would ask it in 1980, with the question mark in the title. Each renaming was a new profession discovering the same body, and the accumulation of names is the proof the thing would not go away. A thing that does not exist does not get named four times in four journals. The thing kept its shape while its name wandered, and a later chapter takes up the naming as a subject in itself. Here the wandering is the point: the question was real

enough to keep being renamed, and unnamed enough that no count of it was ever kept.

In 1969, in Military Medicine, volume 134, pages 441 to 444, E. Hamburger published Vehicular suicidal ideation, a case report, one patient in one ward of the armed services' medical system, written up because the man said the quiet part aloud to his doctor. The 2024 review reports its patient's three reasons, and this book prints them once, at pattern level, and never again. Its price is paid in the eleventh chapter; this chapter only proves it was already audible in 1969. The man considered the road, as the review reports the case, because it would spare his family the stigma, because it would secure the insurance, because it would be quick. Those are a patient's stated beliefs as a review reports them, evidence of what a planner believes, and never of what a planner achieves. By 1969 the mercy economy had a voice in print, and the voice belonged to the man doing the arithmetic on his own life. The arithmetic is the thing to hold: he was weighing the verdict's cost to his family against the verdict's cost to the truth, and he believed the accident would pay. That belief is reported here, and no outcome is confirmed anywhere in this book. In 1973 Norman Tabachnick edited a whole volume on the question, Accident or Suicide? Destruction by Automobile, carried here by its record alone, the question mark still doing the title's work. Its contents were not reached, and its existence is the exhibit: the question had grown large enough to fill a book while he finished his career. A publisher put a book between covers on the subject while the trooper had seven years left on the road, and the book's editor was the Los Angeles group's own Tabachnick, the tradition's center writing its own summary.

Now build the device the chapter exists for: the parallel chronology, two dated columns and nothing argued between them. The columns have a construction rule, and the rule is

stated. No arrow is drawn from the right column to the left. The papers did not reach him, and his scenes did not reach the papers, and the device proves adjacency and adjacency only. In the first column, his years: 1960, a young trooper's first midnights; 1965, his fifth winter of ditches; 1970, the tenth year. Then 1975, the fifteenth, the year the federal census of fatal crashes opened and began, by definition, to miss his category; and 1980, the end of his twenty. In the second column, the papers' years. 1960, Porterfield, the sociologist asking why the two deaths travel together. 1962, Selzer and Payne, the psychiatrists reporting the connection in the clinic. 1964, Macdonald, the practitioner with forty cases. 1965, Frank. 1966, the Los Angeles group. 1967, the one-car paper. 1969, Hamburger's patient. 1973, a volume entire. The right column stops where his era stops; everything after belongs to later chapters. The two lists stand side by side in this chapter's prose, the gap between them standing for the gap in the record.

The right column has its own gaps, and they date the question's own quiet years. Nothing the review lists for 1968, when the conference that produced the examiner's county was already two months past. Nothing for 1970, 1971, 1972, the years the road toll ran highest in the state's own series. The question went to press in 1960 and again in 1965 and again in 1969, and then it waited four years for the volume that named it a literature, while the trooper's ditches were filling with the decade's worst years. The literature's silence and the road's worst years are the same years, and the column records both without drawing the line between them. No claim is made about what he read, what reached him, or what he was taught; the record holds no evidence that he read them. He did not need to; he had the scenes, and the scenes were teaching him what the journals were simultaneously proving. What he read instead is the era's or-

dinary print: the county weekly's items, the patrol's bulletins, the annual report with no category for intent, and the claim is pattern-level and no deeper.

I met this literature late, and the meeting is part of the record, because it is the proof that a reader with no laboratory can still check the count's history. The article of September 2026 carried these citations first, gathered in the writing of it, in the weeks after the trooper's claim finally surfaced into print. Two of the article's names came back wrong and were corrected in the round, and the corrections stand in this book's Note on Evidence, because a book about a ledger's errors has to keep its own ledger clean. Each was then verified against its publisher's record or the review's lists. Most of the pages came back unreached. This book keeps the papers at the width the round established, because a book about a count has to keep its own count honest. The honest count here is: citations verified, abstracts where they exist, the review's tables, and no quotation without a page. That discipline is this chapter's argument about evidence, performed on itself.

What simultaneity proves, and what it cannot, is the finding, and it is worth stating with care. It proves the question was askable and was being asked. The American Sociological Review carried it, the American Journal of Psychiatry carried it, the Archives of General Psychiatry carried it. The askers were sociologists and psychiatrists and medical examiners, during the years he was asking it alone on the road. His suspicion was not a fantasy and not ahead of its time; it was exactly of its time, and the record of his era says so. By 1973 the question had a book. By 1980 it would have a title with a question mark in a medical journal. The era's recognition was complete, and it changed nothing at his courthouse. What simultaneity cannot prove is that he was right in his proportion, or that any particular death

was what he suspected, or that the journals' answer was true. The proportion question belongs to the arithmetic chapter and the verdict; this chapter's claim stops at existence, and existence is proven. Recognition is not reform. The journals asked, and no record this book holds shows a certificate that changed because of it. Those two facts sit together without contradiction: a question can be famous in the journals and invisible at the courthouse, because the journals and the courthouse were never connected by any instrument. The papers were also small, old, and clinical: forty cases here, a case report there, samples drawn from practices and hospitals and never from a census of roads.

The armor goes on the page before the critic writes it. Small old samples prove little, and this chapter agrees completely. The psychiatric literature of the 1960s was built on the patients who happened to arrive, and a driver in treatment is a selected man. Forty cases from one practice, one case report from a military ward, a comparative study from one city's prevention center: none of it measures prevalence, and this book never uses it to. What the row of papers does measure is the question's persistence across every methodological era since. The clinic in 1962, the case review in 1964, the comparison in 1966, the volume in 1973, and the question still standing in the reviews of this decade. The finding is simultaneity, full stop: the question existed in print while he worked. Measurement belongs to the countries with the large samples, the ones that look at every fatal crash, and the second movement ends on them. First the method that made their answers possible has to be watched being built, because it was built in Los Angeles, in the same years, by the same tradition, and it is the sixth chapter's subject.

One beat belongs to the lowered voice. The trooper said his suspicion in an undertone, once, to a playwright, and the journals said it at full voice, on the record, year after year, in the

most respectable houses of their professions. The undertone cost him nothing and bought nothing; the full voice built careers and changed no certificates. The full voice was the era's own consolation: the question could be asked anywhere except where it was asked of him. The right column's gaps are the question's own quiet years, and the gaps on the left are the book's whole account of why he asked alone. The whisper and the literature were the same sentence in two registers, and neither register reached a courthouse.

The two columns stand side by side, then, at the chapter's close, printed the way they were kept. His years on the left. The years of the asking on the right. 1960 to 1980 on the left. 1960, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1973 on the right. Nobody mailed him the journals, and nobody mailed the journals to the courthouse, and the asking continued without him, and his asking continued without them. The question was being asked in print, by these people, in these journals, during the years he was asking it on the road. That is all this chapter claims, on this record, at this width, and it is exactly what the second movement needed to establish before the witnesses are heard. The movement's arc from here is the asking made usable. First the method for gathering intent from the living. Then the examiner who wrote his office's mercy into a rule, then the question of what a story about a death can do, then the question given its name, then the countries that built the looking into law. The next witness is the method itself, the interview of the living, invented in Los Angeles while the ditches were being walked, and it comes in with its founding document in its hands and its founder's name on the door. That document is a JAMA paper from June of 1963, and the sixth chapter opens on its title. The two lists stand side by side in this chapter's prose, and the verdict will carry what they show. And the reader can check this

chapter's claim against them in a glance: he asked, and the journals asked, at the same time, and neither knew.

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Chapter Six

Interviewing the Living

The document is a title, and the title is the method's whole claim, printed where every physician in the country could see it. In June of 1963, in the Journal of the American Medical Association, volume 184, number 12, pages 924 to 929, five men published Investigations of Equivocal Suicides. The trooper was in his third or fourth year of ditches when it ran. The citation is verified at the publisher's record, and the title's plural is worth a pause. Investigations, plural, because the deaths that will not say what they were never arrive one at a time. And equivocal, the paper's word for the cases that resist the box. The trooper's word was usually, and the paper's word was equivocal, and the two words are the same confession at different volumes: some of these deaths are not what they are filed as. The five names are the method's anatomy. Litman, Shneidman, Farberow, Tabachnick: the suicide researchers, the men who studied the mind's last decisions, the founders of the country's first suicide prevention center, a psychologist's and a psychiatrist's craft joined to the coroner's law. Curphey: Theodore J. Curphey, the chief medical examiner-coroner of Los Angeles County, a physician with autopsies at his command and a problem the autopsies could not solve. And the journal itself was the country's widest medical readership, the Journal of the American Medical Association. The founding was announced where every physician in America could trip over it, twenty years before the trooper's claim had anyone to hear it at all but a boy with a play. Whether any did, in the counties this book is about, the record does not say. The paper's body is unread by me, and nothing is quoted from it,

and the method is described from its title and from the standard scholarship of the field it founded. The title is enough to see the founding: a coroner and four students of suicide, together, investigating the deaths that defeat the knife.

Curphey's problem gets its own room here, because the whole book turns on its shape. The scale matters as much as the shape. Los Angeles County's dead arrived by the thousands a year, and its coroner's office was a department with a payroll, and a problem that recurred a hundred times a year justified a solution. A Nebraska county of two thousand might see the equivocal death once in a decade, and no county can build a center for once in a decade. The method's home was the city because the method needs volume, and the trooper's category lived where there was no volume, which is the second reason the book's question has to be asked at the level of system type. He was a physician, the top of the profession's ladder for this work, with a laboratory, a staff of pathologists, a county's budget, and the legal power to open any body he chose. His office held both titles the era knew, coroner and medical examiner, fused into one department with the county's money behind it. And he kept meeting deaths he could not certify. The drowning in the bathtub of a house where the marriage had failed. The pills on the nightstand of a room where the letters were burned. And the crash on the empty road out of the valley. The equivocal cases shared one property: the body told the cause completely and the manner not at all, and the manner was the part the family and the insurer and the law were waiting on. His office's answer to that property, before the method, was the qualified verdict or the quiet default, and the equivocal deaths were the office's confession that the default was a guess. The forms in his office demanded a manner, and in that era their options did not include the truth, which was that nobody knew. The equivocal

were the minority and the persistent minority, the deaths that kept coming back to his desk because the answer was not in the body.

A big county's thousands included enough of them to keep a method busy; a rural county's handful, spread thin across years, taught no one anything. That asymmetry of volume is one of the book's quiet engines. The cities learned because they had the numbers; the counties never learned because they never had enough of the same kind of death to see the pattern. That pattern was the trooper's education.

The body told him what killed them, and the body could not tell him what they meant, and the certificate demanded a manner. He had every power the trooper's courthouse lacked: he could order the autopsy, command the laboratory, subpoena the record, and hold the file open while his staff worked. The answers still escaped him, because the powers were all aimed at the body, and the answer was in the life. The volume was the point: a big city's thousands included enough equivocal deaths to keep a method busy, and the equivocal cases were the residue the volume could not wash away. A physician medical examiner with every instrument the trooper's state lacked still could not sign the equivocal deaths, because the instrument he needed did not cut. It listened.

So Curphey did the thing this book exists to record: he asked the talkers for help. He asked them himself, in the worst weeks of their grief, and he listened. The sequence is worth dating, because the method was born fast and in the trooper's own years. The center founded in 1958. In August 1962 came the famous case. And the founding paper in June 1963, with the term in the same year. Five years from the founding to the charter document, in the years when his midnight calls were becoming a pattern only he could see. By the middle of the trooper's first

decade, Los Angeles had a working instrument for exactly the deaths that filled his nights. It was announced in the country's largest medical journal, in the third or fourth year of his career by the book's own anchors, and no evidence survives that anyone in his state read it. The fifth chapter's columns hold it: the asking was in print, and the asking had a method, and the method had an address.

The Suicide Prevention Center had been founded in Los Angeles in 1958 by Edwin Shneidman, Norman Farberow, and Robert Litman. It was the first center of its kind in the country, as the standard histories describe it, born of the era's discovery that despair could be studied as a public problem and not only as a sin. The center's premise was that a death by one's own hand leaves evidence in the living: in the people who knew the dead, and in the record of the dead person's own words. The premise sounds obvious now, and in 1958 it was a research program with a building and a budget, which is what an idea has to become before it can reach a courthouse. Its founders had spent the fifties reading suicide notes and interviewing the bereaved, building a science of the last act out of the traces it leaves behind. The science outlived its founders and became a field: suicidology, the journals, the prevention centers that followed, and eventually the violent-death surveillance of the second chapter. In time the interview of the living became the research instrument of every serious study this book cites from the countries that look, where it goes by the name of psychosocial investigation and does the same work. The instrument was American, invented on the record in Los Angeles, and the places that use it best, the tenth chapter will show, are elsewhere. The countries that investigate every fatal crash send a psychosocial investigator to the family, and that investigator is Curphey's heir, and the classification of the trooper's category that results is the strongest evidence this

book has. Its career from a Los Angeles office in 1958 to a Nordic roadside in this century is the sixth chapter's quiet proof: the asking works, where anyone is sent to do it.

Shneidman kept retelling the founding for the rest of his life, and his own books are the account this book would use if it quoted him. Deaths of Man in 1973, The Suicidal Mind in 1996, cited here as works and never quoted, because I did not read them at the page. The founder's own account exists for any reader who wants the founding from the founder. This chapter's account is narrower: the date, the names, the title, the premise, and what the method was for.

Curphey brought the center into the coroner's work, and the collaboration they built has a name now: the psychological autopsy. Its definition is the book's simplest and hardest sentence: interviewing the living to learn the intentions of the dead. The coroner had the dead and the legal power; the center had the living and the questions to ask them. Together they could work a death that neither could work alone, and the working is what the founding paper reported, at the width its title and the standard scholarship allow. Nothing from its body is quoted; the method is described at the level of what it was and when it began, and the book says so.

What the method gathers is what the third chapter's criteria require. The history, the prior attempts, the preparations, the statements that read differently afterward, the illness, the crisis of the last weeks. The interview is a long, structured, careful conversation with the widow, the brother, the employer, the doctor, and it asks what the dead person said and did and arranged. The investigator reconstructs the last weeks the way the reconstructor reconstructs the last seconds, from the marks people leave, where the reconstructor's marks are the tires'. Then the case is conferenced: the evidence weighed in a room of

colleagues, the manner argued to a conclusion, the verdict delivered as the office's judgment and never as one man's mood. Its premise is the book's premise in miniature: intent is real evidence, and it lives with the living, and someone has to go and get it. The autopsy reads the body. The psychological autopsy reads the life. Neither replaces the other, and the equivocal death needs both.

The method's terrain is the last weeks of a life, and its map of that terrain is worth a paragraph at pattern level. What did the dead person say, and to whom, and when? What did they arrange: the debts, the insurance, the farewells that were not called farewells? And what had happened: the diagnosis, the divorce, the failure, the anniversary? And who had they been before: the earlier attempt, the earlier illness, the long pattern of the drinking? The interview assembles the weeks into an answer, and the answer is never the scene's, because the scene is one night and the answer is a life. The crash took minutes; the interview reconstructs months, and the months are where intent lives. And the living the method works through deserve their own account, because they are the evidence. The widow knows the last weeks; the brother knows the history; the doctor knows the illness; the employer knows the trouble at work; the friend knows the remark that landed wrong at the last visit. Each holds a fragment, and none holds the answer, and the interview's skill is the assembly of fragments no one witness understood. The grieving are the only archive the equivocal death has, and the archive is kept in houses, in grief's own handwriting, and the method is the reading of it. The criteria called the result explicit or implicit evidence of intent, and the third chapter printed that much. This chapter adds the human price: the fragments are gathered from people in the worst week of their lives, by a stranger, about the person they have just lost. That is

the instrument's cost, and it is also its power.

The craft of the asking deserves a sentence of its own, because the criteria's two elements depend on it. The interviews gathered the record's soft tissue: what the dead man had said about dying, what he had planned, what he had stopped planning, who he owed, what he had settled and what he had left unsettled. The medication on the shelf and the letter in the drawer. Nothing in the kit is exotic, and that is the point the sixth chapter exists to make. The instrument was attention, organized and given a name, and attention is what a rural county was never built to spend on a dead driver. The interviewer does not ask the widow whether her husband meant to die; the interviewer asks what he said, what he did, what he arranged, what changed, and the meaning is read from the answers. Its care is the family's protection too: no one is asked to accuse, and no one is asked to absolve, and the verdict is built from the facts they give without being told what the facts are for. The verdict that comes back is a judgment on evidence gathered, which is a different thing from a guess at a ghost, and the distinction is the method's whole defense against the charge of mind-reading. Whether the defense holds is the contest this chapter reports.

And the method has a known limit the book will not hide, because the limit is the next chapter's subject. The interview makes the family the witness, and a witness with an interest is a witness under pressure, and the certifier who hears the family's account hears the family's wishes too. Those wishes are the mercy economy's raw material, and the eleventh chapter prices them, and this chapter only notes that the method creates the channel they travel through. It gathers intent from the living, and the living have their own reasons, and the seventh chapter watches a medical examiner build his office's rule around exactly that pressure. The instrument is honest. The room it is

played in is not.

Step back and the chapter's shape shows: this is the movement's answer to the trooper, standing up. His claim, tested, would have required exactly this: someone to ask the living, someone to weigh the answers, someone with the legal power to write the answer down. The interview of the living is what his suspicion needed and what his roads never got. And the whole second question of the book, whether mercy was the motive, has to be asked with the method's absence in view, because a mercy no one could have practiced is a motive no one can prove. The counties that lacked the method lacked the machinery of mercy too; what they had was the default, and the default wore the same face.

Shneidman gave the trooper's category its own name in the same years, and the name is worth the chapter's pause. In 1963, in The Study of Lives, edited by Robert W. White, Shneidman described subintentioned death, cited here as a work, its page unrecovered: the death the person helps along, covertly or half-consciously, through risk and drink and self-neglect and terrible judgment. His larger taxonomy set the intentioned beside the unintentioned, with the subintentioned between them, the deaths where the person's own hand is on the scale and never fully visible on it. The trooper's category sits inside that middle band, and the band is the reason his claim can never be proved wrong case by case: the subintentioned death is the one the record can never fully convict. His framework is cited at that width, as a work of its year, and the standard scholarship has carried it since. The concept is the silhouette's clinical twin. The man who never writes a note because he never fully decides, the one who lets the risk do the deciding for him: Shneidman's term held him before the trooper ever spoke of him. That term never spread the way the method spread, and the book notes

the difference without explaining it: the interview became the instrument, and the diagnosis stayed the founder's own. The name matters to the book because the name is what the trooper lacked, a way to say the thing without the accusation the whole word carries.

The method had its famous case before the founding paper was in print. The famous case is carried here at the width the record allows: one page, named in full, stated as the historical record has it, without quotation. In August 1962, Marilyn Monroe died, and the country watched the certificate. The press wanted a word; the office had a method; the record, as the record states it, kept the qualified finding. And the Los Angeles County coroner's office, with the Suicide Prevention Center's investigators working the case, returned a finding of probable suicide. The finding is printed as the record states it, and the reason it prints in this book is on the page with it: it is the one famous certificate that printed a qualified verdict. The most watched death of the decade was not declared neatly. There was no definitive scene to declare from, and the office did not invent one. The coroner, with the method in his hands, said probable, and the qualification was the honesty, and the honesty was possible because the method had gathered evidence the body could not. The finding was reported at the time as the record states it, and this book does not quote the era's coverage, because the finding itself is the whole exhibit. Every element this book is about was in that case. The equivocal death, the famous name, the press at the door, the family and the studio and the politics. The coroner's answer was two words long and hedged, because the evidence supported probable and did not support more. That is what a qualified verdict is for. The era expected a neat answer for a famous death, and the office refused to give one, and the refusal was the method's advertisement to every

coroner in the country: you are allowed to say probable. The advertisement did not travel as far as the Nebraska courthouse, so far as the record can show. The trooper's dead never got its benefit.

That is the finding the chapter is built to carry. Intention is gathered from the living by a method with a date and a founder, and even a physician examiner with an autopsy could not certify the equivocal without it. The date is 1958, the founders are Shneidman and his colleagues, the method is the interview of the living. The equivocal death is the trooper's claim, and the book's question is whether a county attorney with a folder could ever have been asked to do what a physician with a center did. Curphey had everything Nebraska did not, the laboratory, the staff, the budget, the power, and he still needed the interview. The county attorney had the same legal power over the manner box and none of the instrument, which is the book's problem housed in one office. That power to decide existed everywhere; the power to know existed only where someone had built it. The book's two American witnesses in this movement are physicians, this one and the next chapter's, and the book says so plainly, because the Nebraska decider is a prosecutor. It would be convenient for the argument if the witnesses were prosecutors too, and they are not, and the book will not pretend otherwise. The men who built the honest answer were doctors with laboratories and budgets. Asked of Nebraska, the question is whether a system without either can answer what they answered. The prosecutors had neither the autopsy nor the interview, and the deaths kept arriving.

Over the method there is a real contest, and it belongs on the page before any critic writes it, because the method is contested. The interview of the grieving is an instrument with an operator, and operators vary. The reliability of suicide deter-

mination was argued in the journals for decades. Nelson, Farberow, and MacKinnon in 1978; Jobes and his colleagues in the mid-1980s; the works are cited here as works, at the width of their records, because I did not read them at the page. The debate's shape is known from the standard scholarship: whether two investigators, given the same death, reach the same manner, and whether the interview improves the agreement or decorates the disagreement. The field's answer was the operational criteria of 1988, the third chapter's document, an attempt to make the judgment mechanical enough to survive its operators. They were written by a working group drawn from coroners and medical examiners and statisticians and public-health agencies, and the field admitted the contest and answered it with a checklist. Its own authors wrote down that certifiers may face pressures, including family concerns, and the twelfth chapter carries that sentence to its page. This book reports the contest and takes no side beyond this: an imperfect instrument honestly used beats a perfect record of nothing. The critics' question is the right one: can a conversation with the bereaved produce a verdict two investigators would reach alike? Its cost is worth a sentence of its own: every reliability dispute in that literature is a death argued over twice. The families inside those studies heard their verdicts change with the investigator, which is the reason the stakes of the contest are human and not technical. The defenders built the criteria to make it so; the third chapter carries what they wrote. And the book's verdict on the method is narrower than either side's: the interview is imperfect and indispensable, and the alternative is not a better instrument. The alternative is no instrument, which is what the trooper's counties had. A contested method with a criteria list is an honest machine; a prosecutor's instinct with no method at all is the thing the fourth chapter built.

What the interview costs is part of its story, and the cost is why the counties never had it. The psychological autopsy takes trained interviewers, hours per death, a center to organize them, and a certifier willing to wait weeks for an answer the family may not want. It takes, in short, an institution. In Los Angeles, in 1958, the money and the center and the certifier existed. In a Nebraska county of two thousand, in 1968, there was no center, no interviewer, no budget, no tradition, and no one whose job was the asking. The widow lived across the café from the man who would have had to ask her. The method's absence from the trooper's state was structural, and the structure is the fourth chapter's machine: nothing in it employed an asker. What the criteria answered to did not reach the state either, and the twelfth and eighteenth chapters carry what the certifiers' own working group said about the pressures that answer to a family in the room.

And the cruel part is how little the borrowing would have required. The coroner's physician already existed in the statutes, a doctor with a statutory errand. One line of practice, one habit, one standing instruction from the county attorney's association or the state, asking him to ask, would have built the method's skeleton into the machine. The statutes had room for it; the statute of the coroner's physician already let the coroner request an autopsy, and the same section could have carried a request to ask the living, and no one ever wrote that sentence. No such instruction existed, and no one wrote it, and the interview stayed in Los Angeles. The design did not refuse the method. It never met it, the meeting was never demanded, and the equivocal deaths of the trooper's counties were certified by default instead.

The trooper's silhouette is the equivocal death's highway form. And the chapter's last connection is this: the deaths Cur-

phey could not certify and the deaths the trooper suspected are the same kind of death, the one where the body is silent and the answer lives with the living. The equivocal death is defined by what cannot be proved from the scene, and the trooper's category is the equivocal death with an engine and a steering wheel. In Los Angeles the answer was sought, by a physician with a center behind him. On the trooper's roads it was never sought at all, and the death went down as the road's accident, and the county's count kept its silence, and the silence is what the arithmetic chapter has to price. The psychological autopsy was invented in the years he was walking the ditches, in the same country, in the same decade, for exactly his cases. It never reached them, because it required an institution, and his state had assigned the institution's work to a prosecutor with a folder.

Behind this one stand the fifth chapter's columns: while he walked, the method was built, and the building was printed, and the print did not travel. The method's founders are dead, and the center they built still works. And the interview of the living is now the standard instrument wherever the equivocal death is taken seriously, which is to say wherever someone is paid to take it seriously. The counties that look, the countries that look, have it; the trooper's county did not. That is what the sixth chapter settles, and it is the movement's hinge. The living are where the method goes for intent, and even a physician examiner with an autopsy could not certify the equivocal without it, and the trooper's state had neither. The state had the deaths, and the method had an address, and no one drove the distance between them. And the finding the record keeps from the method's famous case is the one this chapter closes on, because it shows the point of the chapter in two words. In August of 1962, on the most famous certificate of the era, a coroner who had learned to ask the living printed two words where the era printed one. Proba-

ble suicide. The qualification was the method's gift: a certificate that said what was known and no more, at the cost of the family's comfort and the courthouse's peace, in full view of the country. It is the finding this movement of the book closes on, because the finding and the trooper's whisper are the same act of honesty at opposite ends of the machinery. His whisper cost him nothing and was never recorded; the coroner's was recorded and cost the office its neatness. The gift had a price the book does not hide: the family of a qualified verdict does not get the clean story, and the fifteenth chapter weighs that price against the mercy's price in columns. That is what honesty about intent looks like on a certificate: the qualified verdict, the two words, the record keeping its own counsel about the rest. The trooper's Nebraska never had the instrument that makes it possible. The next chapter watches a physician who had the instrument and still kept a separate rule for the family. That is the movement's hinge, and the mercy's first proof on the record.

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Chapter Seven

The Examiner's Own County

The document is a chapter in a conference proceedings, and it opens with Camus, which is not how a government pathology volume usually opens. Accident Pathology, the proceedings of a June 1968 conference in Washington, edited by Kenneth M. Brinkhous, published in Chapel Hill by the University of North Carolina in 1970, prepared under contract for the National Highway Safety Bureau, 249 pages, read at the page in a digitized copy. Mark the sponsor: the federal government's own highway safety bureau paid for the conference, which is to say the government was told, on its own dime, what its ledgers were doing. The volume went to the libraries and the bureaus, and the ledgers went on exactly as before, and the trooper's stretch of Interstate 80 never heard a word of it that this book can show. The government knew by 1970, in print, in its own sponsored volume, and the knowing changed nothing, because the knowing was never connected to a county attorney's pen. It stood between a paper on roadside investigations and a paper on pediatric injuries, one exhibit among many, and it carried the category's own name in its title. The conference's subject was the pathology of accidents, and Edland's chapter was the one session about the deaths that were not accidents, filed under the heading anyway.

On page 42 begins "Vehicular Suicide," by John F. Edland and J. Thorson, and I read all four pages of it at the page in HathiTrust's full view, the Michigan copy, because the book's rule is that a document is described only when it has been seen. The chapter opens with an epigraph the authors chose, Camus's

sentence: “There is only one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.” A coroner opened his chapter with a philosopher, and the footnote explains why. Camus died in an auto crash in 1960, and his death was certified as an accident, as nearly all of them were. Edland had stood over the bodies of men who died that way, in his own county, for years, and the epigraph is what a man chooses when he has stood there long enough. The proceedings’ full 249 pages run from biomechanics to blast injury, the era’s official expertise on the crash. The suicide chapter is the volume’s one act of doubt about its own title, four pages of it, on the government’s own shelf. Edland’s footnote adds the date and the manner of it: an auto crash, 1960, certified as an accident. The examiner opened with the writer who died on the road, and then he spent four pages proving that the record of the road could not be trusted to say so. The choice of epigraph is the author’s own, and the book reads it as a certifier’s wink: we all know what the ledger misses, and we sign the ledger anyway.

Edland is the book’s second American witness, and his biography is part of the testimony. When he wrote the chapter he was at the University of Missouri School of Medicine, and the chapter’s footnote marks him as, presently, chief medical examiner of Monroe County, New York, in Rochester. He moved from a coroners’ state to an examiner’s office in the years the chapter was in proof, and he carried the coroners’ records with him in print. The two systems’ difference is the twelfth chapter’s measurement; his career crossed it, and the chapter reads like a man reporting from the far side. And the man who would later run Monroe County’s office, and write its own epidemiology with Kunitz in 1973, learned the ledger’s habits in Missouri first, and the chapter is the education printed. The career is the witness’s credential: he had read the certificates from both sides

of the country's design divide, and the chapter is what he found in the files. He is the physician-examiner again: a doctor with an office, a laboratory, the power to autopsy, and the habit of looking. The movement's two American witnesses are both physicians, and the book says so plainly, because the Nebraska decider is a lawyer, and the difference is the argument's ground. What he reported from Missouri, where he had been studying traffic-fatality reports and the death certificates attached to them, is the mechanism this book is about, described by a certifier, on the record, in 1970. The records were sketchy, he admits at the page, and most were deficient in describing the histories of the persons involved. That is the third chapter's problem from the file's side: the paperwork never asked, so the paperwork could not say.

He described two curious procedures, in his own words' neighborhood, at page 43, and they are the chapter's spine. First: if a suicide crash can be proved, it is not reported among the traffic fatalities. Second: the automobile is not listed in the suicide statistics as an instrument of self-destruction. A proved road suicide left the traffic ledger, and the suicide ledger had no column for the road. He reported, too, the practice that followed from the procedures: coroners ruling accidental while the police, convinced of suicide, removed the victim's name from the traffic-fatality list. The two ledgers of the same county could disagree silently about the same death, and neither ledger ever had to explain itself to the other. His category fell between two counting systems by design, and Edland wrote the design down five years before the federal crash census existed. The second chapter's exit door, the deliberate-intent exclusion the standard prints, has its documentary ancestor here, in a practitioner describing what the ledgers did in practice.

And the chapter is also a reader's report on the literature

of the sixth chapter's years, and its account of the earlier work can be quoted at the page. Selzer and Payne's study, as Edland gives it: sixty male psychiatric inpatients, of whom 33 admitted to suicidal thoughts or attempts, and those 33 had over twice as many motor-vehicle accidents as the 27 who reported none. The fifth chapter carries that paper at its citation; here it is worth one sentence of content, because Edland read it as the trooper's question in clinic form: the drivers with the history crashed more. The era's alcohol findings, as he gives them: studies concluding that substantial alcohol ingestion occurs in over half the cases of both conventional suicide and fatal traffic accident. His own cited question follows: whether the alcoholic incurs accidents because he is intoxicated, or becomes intoxicated in order to cause an accident. The question is the thirteenth chapter's problem in one sentence, asked by a certifier in 1970. And the drink confounds the count twice, as cause and as courage, and the confounding was already in print on a government's shelf. The drink and the despair shared a population in the literature he was reading.

And the chapter carries its author's own thesis about the count, at the page. The unreliability of suicide determinations is caused, above all, by the lack of adequate investigation. Certifiers who limit themselves to the examination of the body will leave the questions unanswered. He praised Los Angeles's psychological-autopsy principle by name and asked for its multidisciplinary approach in motor-vehicle deaths. The sixth chapter's method had a champion in the examiner's own county, and the champion's own files were the Missouri records the chapter describes.

Then the case that this book would not have without him. He found one, in his own words at the page, complete with suicide note, supporting history, and scene photographs suggesting an

intentional crash, and a death certificate that ruled the death accidental. Lay the third chapter's criteria over that file and the file passes them: the note is explicit evidence, the history is implicit evidence, the photographs answer the scene. The criteria did not exist yet in 1968, and the file satisfied them anyway, and the certificate said accident anyway. The coroner who signed it explained: "The man obviously had an accident while he was trying to kill himself." Read the sentence twice. He knew. And the sentence's grammar is the lesson: he was trying to kill himself is the subordinate clause, he had an accident is the main clause, and the certificate was written from the main clause. The book's title asks what the count is; this coroner answered with his syntax. The evidence was in the file. And the certificate said accident anyway, and the man who signed it said why without seeming to hear himself: because it was obviously an accident, even while it was a suicide. Edland adds, in the same passage, that suicides of many kinds are often ruled accidental or natural to protect the reputations or the estates of the persons involved. The estates clause is the eleventh chapter's insurance paragraph arriving a year early, in a certifier's voice. That is the mercy mechanism, printed by a medical examiner, in a government-sponsored volume, while the trooper had a decade left on the road.

The 2024 systematic review quotes a practice rule from Edland's office. If suicide is a reasonable certainty, the certificate is signed vehicular suicide. If highly probable, signed vehicular suicide with the family's consent, or as undetermined without it. That is the negotiated ledger in a certifier's own sentence, the mercy box with a procedure attached. It prints at second hand, labeled as such, because it is not in the chapter I read, and the book's rule holds: known only from the review, labeled, or not printed at all. The review cites it to a page that cannot exist in

a 249-page volume, so the sentence may belong to another Edland paper or to the review's compression, and this book does not pretend to know which. What the chapter does contain, at the page, is the coroner's sentence above. The distinction the verdict carries stands on both documents. A highly probable suicide becoming undetermined without consent is accommodation of the family. It is a different act from knowingly certifying accident, and the coroner's sentence shows the second act happening.

One larger study inside the chapter deserves its own account. In the Kansas City area, with what he calls at the page a sophisticated, well-trained, and highly motivated accident-investigation unit working beside him, the investigators made their judgment. Thirteen of the previous year's 86 traffic fatalities, they judged, resulted from 11 purposely caused collisions. The evidence was the kind the third chapter's criteria imagine: three drivers had threatened suicide immediately before departing, four had histories of suicidal threats or attempts, one had a gross psychiatric illness, and none left a note. All 11 drivers died, and two passengers died with them, and the second party's presence in that count is the fifteenth chapter's weight, and this chapter registers it and moves on. The unit could find the truth; the certificates could not hold it; the two facts are the chapter in one sentence. Of those 11 deaths, all by the investigators' own judgment intentional, the number certified as suicide was one. The judgment of eleven belongs to the investigators, and the certification of one belongs to the system, and the distance between the two numbers is the book's subject measured in a single city in a single year. Whether the investigators were right is its own question, and the book does not settle it, because a reassessment is a judgment and never a ground truth. The chapter's point stands either way: the answer was never going

to be certified anyway. The one certified case proves the door existed; the ten prove it was barely used. And the investigators who judged the eleven were reading threats and histories, the third chapter's implicit evidence, gathered by asking, which is the sixth chapter's method at work inside a police unit.

The same year tells the same story at the state's width. In Missouri in 1967, Edland reports, 1,320 persons died in traffic fatalities, and all were certified accidental. The country that year counted 53,000 such deaths, he writes, and they were almost unanimously certified accidental, so the policy was national and not Missouri's own. One thousand three hundred and twenty deaths, and not one of them meant to happen, according to the certificates. A state ledger reading one hundred percent accident is not a measurement; it is a policy. The book's second question, whether mercy was the motive, can be asked of a policy, and the answer the record allows is that the policy's name was habit and its defense was proof. The policy existed, in print, with a certifier's name on it, and the mercy is what the deliberation must weigh. He knew what the investigators knew, and the certificates said otherwise, and the distance between those two is the ledger this book indicts. And in the discussion after his talk, the dean of American forensic pathology, Milton Helpern of New York City, gave the profession's answer to the pressure, at page 45. If he were in doubt about a case, he would leave it unclassified and say circumstances undetermined on the certificate. The certifier who writes suicide, he said, bears the burden of proof, and juries and courts presume a death is not suicide. His office was the country's most famous, and his doctrine was the profession's practiced answer to the family in the room. And, he added, there is nothing in the work that says one must put a final classification on anything. The honest box had a champion at the top of the profession, in the same room, on the same

day. The champion's reason was the burden of proof: the undetermined classification is the finding that lets the evidence stay open, and the accident verdict is the finding that closes it early.

And here the book must say the plain thing about its own ground. Nebraska's record holds no account like Edland's. No Missouri-style review of the certificates against the crash reports. No examiner's memoir. And no coroner on the record about practice in the trooper's era at all, until the anonymous county attorney of the 2008 survey saying that no one reviews the cause or manner of death. The mechanism this chapter documents is documented for other places: Missouri's records, Rochester's office, New York's crisis, England's inquest rooms. Whether it operated in Nebraska is the sixth proposition, and it remains a hypothesis, because the trooper's state left no Edland behind. The absence of such an account is the fourth chapter's silence stated in a witness's register: a system with no examiner writes no examiner's memoir. What Nebraska's county attorneys said for the record waits for the eighteenth chapter. What they said in 2008 is the fourth chapter's. The era's silence is this chapter's, and the three silences are one silence measured at three dates. The trooper's claim had no Edland and no Kansas City unit behind it, and the record's shape is exactly what that absence looks like. The whisper was right in kind, and the record of the kind now exists at the page, and the proportion is still unmeasured, and the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters say why it stays unmeasured.

Another participant, Dr. Petty, made a stranger proposal in the same discussion: that the manner of death might be made a confidential portion of the certificate, so the family would never have to see it. The proposal went nowhere, and it deserves its sentences here because it shows the profession knew exactly where the pain sat. In 1968, in a Washington room, the men

in the discussion understood the family's veto before the literature had a name for it. Colonel Leeper moderated. That record sits on page 45, and it reads like the profession thinking out loud about this book: what investigation would cost, whether manner should be hidden from the family, what a certifier owes the proof. The box was public, and the public was the family, and one answer on offer was to hide the box. The book's argument runs the other way: the honest box, used in the open, says what the evidence says, and the hiding is the harm. A third, Dr. Huelke, reported that Michigan investigators interviewing young male drivers found about ten percent who had contemplated suicide within three months of the interview. The car's drivers were telling the researchers what the certificates never told the counties.

Now the counterweight, because the book weighs both. Stefan Timmermans's ethnography of a medical examiner's office, published in the American Sociological Review in 2005 and read at page 311, found that in the office he studied, relatives' concerns have a marginal influence on suicide determinations. That is the strongest counterweight on the record: a professional office, observed closely, where the family's wishes did not move the verdict much. One office, one ethnographer, one finding, and the book carries it as exactly that. The mechanism's existence is established; the honest question asks how wide it runs, and the type-level measurement of that question is the twelfth chapter's; this one only shows the mechanism has a voice. And the book's one documented accident-box practice from a physician's office ran on pressure of a different kind: the New York City medical examiner's office of 1985 to 1988. As Hugh Whitt's 2006 study reports at the abstract's width, the city's reported suicides fell from 1985 to 1988 and returned in 1989. The fall was an artifact of personnel and policy changes under politi-

cal, economic, and journalistic pressure, with suicides hidden in non-motor-vehicle accidents and, to a lesser degree, in undetermined external causes. That was not mercy; that was politics, and the book keeps the two apart, because the difference is the thing the verdict has to judge. Against both, set Gordon Tait and Belinda Carpenter's 2013 study of English inquests, verified at page 97. A coroner asks, in his own words: why leave the family with the stigma of this, when we can actually make their situation better? The study observed inquests and interviewed six coroners, and it records other officials rejecting the family-protective influence, and the book carries both sides of its record. It is a small study of another country's rooms, and it is the first direct qualitative evidence the book holds of the mercy mechanism from a decider's own mouth: a certifier saying the quiet part, on the record, to researchers. The mercy mechanism has a voice, and the voice is a coroner's own, and the study records other officials rejecting it.

And the certifier's strongest professional defense belongs on the page too, because the book is not a prosecution. The National Association of Medical Examiners' guide to manner-of-death classification, 2002, read at pages 5 and 8, holds that classifications rest on evidence, that uncertainty is real, and that a classification can be amended when new evidence arrives. Accident or undetermined, it holds, is the proper finding when suicide would be speculation. The guide's caution cuts toward both sides of this book: it protects the certifier from guessing, and it licenses the default that swallowed the trooper's category. A rule that says do not speculate will, in a county with no investigation, always read the same way. By that standard, Edland's Missouri coroner was wrong, because the file held a note and a history and photographs. By that standard, Helpern was right, because doubt has an honest box. The standard and the practice

lived in the same profession at the same time, which is what a negotiated ledger looks like from inside.

From his own years, the studies of the trooper's own category fill the chapter's remaining shelf, each at its verified width. Schmidt, Perlin, Townes, Fisher, and Shaffer's 1972 comparison of lone drivers, in the Archives of General Psychiatry, is carried by its record. It is a comparative study of drivers in single-car accidents, from the same Maryland group that would measure the share five years later. Pokorny, Smith, and Finch's twenty-eight consecutive automobile fatalities of 1972, investigated in depth, with four judged suicides and three of the four lone, as the 2024 review's table reports it, at second hand. It is the nearest thing the era made to the trooper's exact claim: a run of consecutive deaths with the asking done. Four of twenty-eight is fourteen percent, and the sample is twenty-eight, and both facts print, because the band's honesty is that small deep studies run high and large shallow studies run low. Schmidt, Shaffer, Zlotowitz, and Fisher's Maryland series of 1977 studied 182 fatally injured drivers and 96 nonfatally injured over six years, and the abstract, verified, reports that only 1.7 percent of the total fatal crashes were considered suicides. The denominator is kept as the abstract gives it. That 1.7 percent is the low end of the band the fourteenth chapter prints, the honest counterweight to the trooper's usual. It is printed beside the Kansas City investigators' eleven of 86, because the honest reading of the movement is that the estimates disagree, and the disagreement is about who was looking. Maryland had a medical examiner; Kansas City had an investigation unit; the trooper's counties had neither, and the band's ends are the instruments' difference. Schmidt's Maryland had the medical examiner's office and got the low estimate. Kansas City had the unit and found eleven. The trooper's roads had the folder, and the folder found

none, and none is the finding the band can never prove, because no one was looking.

This chapter's evidence moves two of the book's seven claims, and the movement is stated in the open. The fourth claim, that some certifiers accommodate families, is supported and near proven for the route to undetermined. The support: Edland's office rule at second hand, Helpern's doctrine at the page, the English coroner's question at the page, the working group's own sentence about family concerns. The fifth claim, that some certifiers certify suspected suicides as accidents out of mercy, stays open. What this chapter's page documents is the outcome the mercy would leave: eleven purposeful collisions in one examiner's series, one certified, and a state whose whole year's road dead were all filed as accidents. The page shows the misclassification. It does not show a motive, and the book does not pretend the two are the same exhibit. The one documented accident-box practice with a motive attached is Whitt's New York office, and it ran on politics and never on kindness. For Nebraska, it is unshown, and the book does not show it. The distinction the verdict rests on is the distinction this chapter was built to draw: the undetermined route and the accident route are different acts with different names, and the evidence for each has a different address. The first route protects the family from the verdict; the second hides the death from the count, and the fifteenth chapter prices both.

What the chapter leaves the reader holding is this. The family enters at the point of certification, and every actor on the page knew it: Edland's coroner, Helpern's doctrine, Petty's proposal, the English coroner's question. The documented route of accommodation is to the undetermined box. And the documented route to the accident box ran on pressure in New York and on habit in Missouri. And a coroner in England has said in

his own words why he would spare the family. There are no control groups here, and the chapter concedes it: case accounts and one ethnography and one interview study do not measure prevalence. What they establish is narrower and sufficient: the family enters at the point of certification, the route of accommodation has a name and a box, and the accident route exists in the record, with a coroner's sentence printed over it. The examiner's own county is any county with an examiner; the trooper's counties had none; the mechanism had a champion and a critic in the same Washington room, and neither was heard on the road. The mechanism the examiner wrote down is the finding, and it was written down in 1970, in a volume the government paid for, by a man who ran a medical examiner's office and counted what the certificates said. He counted them in a coroners' state, in the trooper's own years, and printed the count where the government could read it. And the book's close for it is Helpern's own practice, quoted at the page from the same room: a certificate marked circumstances undetermined, left open because the evidence stayed open. The honest box existed, and the top of the profession used it, and the trooper's counties had never heard of either that this book can show. That is the chapter's weight: the remedy existed in the same room as the mechanism, and the remedy's name was a box the Nebraska form would eventually print as could not be determined. And the certificate marked undetermined is the chapter's last image. It is the honest answer to the trooper's category, the honest box his whisper always meant. The eighteenth chapter returns the book's verdict on it, on the record as it stands.

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Chapter Eight

The Headline and the Throttle

The most dangerous page in the book's bibliography is an abstract. It is the one piece of the record that says this book's subject can hurt the reader of it. It is the only abstract in this book with its own warning label, and the warning is the whole book's, carried out loud. The paper behind it is three pages long, it has been standing since 1977, and the fight it started is the reason this chapter exists at all. The fight is the subject, and the subject is the disguise, and the disguise is the trooper's claim, so the book owes the fight a hearing at full width.

On June 24, 1977, in Science, volume 196, pages 1464 to 1466, David P. Phillips published Motor vehicle fatalities increase just after publicized suicide stories, and the abstract, verified at the record, gives the finding its numbers. The title is the finding, the way the era's best papers wore their answers on their spines, and the abstract underneath it is the numbers. An average 9.12 percent rise in motor vehicle fatalities in the week after a suicide story. The more publicity, the larger the rise. And the paper attributed the rise to imitative suicides, some of them, it argued, disguised as motor vehicle accidents. Science was the country's general scientific weekly, the place the findings went when they were meant to be heard by everyone, and this one was heard. The author would spend the decade defending it, and the decade would not settle it, and the settlement's absence is this chapter's honest center. The finding crossed from the journals into the safety literature and the reporting guidelines, and the book's rules descend from it, which is a debt this chapter pays in the open and will keep paying at every chapter's end.

The decade that produced it was the decade the country built its safety apparatus, and the research and the apparatus grew together, and the crash ledger they shared is the second chapter's document. What the abstract claims, stated slowly because it matters: a story about a death might produce deaths. Some of the produced deaths might come by car. The cars would be filed as accidents. And the loop would close invisibly, with the county paper printing driver lost control over a death the headline helped cause. The trooper's aside, it turned out, had a research question's teeth.

What the 1977 paper did, at the abstract's width, was this: it measured the country's fatal crashes in the weeks before and after publicized suicide stories. It found the rise where the stories were, and it graded the rise by the story's publicity. The design's strength is its bluntness: the count of deaths is a hard number, and the week is a hard window, and the publicity is measurable. The design's weakness is the one this book carries everywhere: the crash ledger cannot see intent. A rise in crashes after a story is a rise in a category that excludes the intentional by construction. And the paper's answer, that some of the rise was suicides disguised as accidents, is an argument about what the ledger hides made from what the ledger shows. The trooper would have recognized the problem at once: it is his problem, with a time series attached.

This chapter has to make one distinction cleanly, and keep making it, because the safety of the rest of the book depends on it. There is a general finding: media reporting of suicide affects subsequent suicide, and that finding has a consensus behind it, the accumulated decades of studies that kept finding the same shape in different countries and different media. And there is a specific finding: that the effect shows up in fatal crashes, and that finding is disputed, and the dispute ran for a decade in the

journals. The general finding is never allowed, in this book, to validate the specific one. The two findings answer different questions, about different records, with different confidence, and the habit of letting the strong one lend its strength to the weak one is exactly the habit this book was built to refuse. The specific one stands or falls on its own record, and the record is a fight. The fight is carried here at the width of the abstracts and the published exchange, because I did not read every paper at the page, and I say so. The reader who wants the war can have it; the citations are given in full for exactly that reason. The exchange is the kind of fight the field could afford to have in public, because both sides were arguing about the same numbers.

Phillips built the finding across the seventies. In 1974, in the American Sociological Review, volume 39, he published The influence of suggestion on suicide: substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect. The frame's claim was that suggestion operates on the suicidal, that a publicized death gives a shape to a wish, and that the shape then appears in the mortality statistics. The 1974 paper's venue was sociology's flagship, and the finding's later home in Science was the country's general scientific weekly. That career, from the field's journal to everyone's weekly, is the career of a result that was meant to be heard. The claim was large and the evidence was aggregate, and the aggregate is the argument's strength and its weakness at once, because a national rise can be read from the calendar or from the story. That ambiguity is the whole decade in one sentence, and the critics of 1984 and 1985 lived inside it. The frame was sociology's own, and the name was the novel's, and the two would stay entangled for a decade. In 1979, in the American Journal of Sociology, volume 84, pages 1150 to 1174, he extended it into the roads. Three days after a publicized suicide, automobile fatalities rise, 31 percent in the abstract's figure. That rise

concentrates in single-car accidents. And the driver's age correlates with the age of the person in the story. The third day and the single car and the matched age are the finding's whole anatomy: a delay short enough to be imitation, a crash shape lonely enough to be hidden, and a demographic match specific enough to be eerie. That shape is the trooper's silhouette, measured. That last finding is the one that turns a statistic into a person: the dead drivers were the age of the dead in the headline. That is what imitation looks like when it is measured, if the measurement holds, and the if carries the chapter. The trooper read such scenes without any of this machinery; the machinery was asking whether his scenes were manufactured by the news. His answer is not in the record, because he was never asked, and the asking is the sixth chapter's method, and the method never reached his roads.

The social shape of the finding is worth a paragraph of its own, because it is the trooper's silhouette seen from above. The age match implies the dead were reading about someone like themselves. The single-car concentration implies the deaths that could hide were the ones that rose. And the third-day peak implies the deed followed the news the way a fever follows an infection. Each implication is the trooper's claim in miniature, and each is the disputed finding's. The book holds the shape at the width of the abstracts and no wider, because the critics were right about the weakest version, and the strongest version was never the trooper's argument anyway. The 1977 paper's number, the 9.12 percent, sits beside the 1979 paper's 31. The two figures have different windows and different widths, and the book prints them each with its own. The habit of merging unlike numbers is the habit this book exists to break.

And the replications came from his own camp and the criticism from outside it. There were Bollen and Phillips, 1981, a

Detroit replication of the crash finding, and 1982, a national study of the effects of television news stories. The finding had its friends as well as its enemies, and the friends were inside the finding's camp. That is what a real research program looks like from the outside: the replication attempts were the proof the question was being taken seriously enough to test. Phillips also ran the finding against fictional television suicide stories in 1982. The book carries that study so that its critics have their target, because a finding that depends on fiction is the weakest version of the claim, and the critics went straight at it. And Kessler and Stipp, in 1984, found data errors in the fictional-television study, the kind of error that poisons a regression's roots. They answered with corrections, and the corrections bred corrections, and the decade's lesson was that the weakest version of a true-looking finding can carry the finding's reputation down with it. Baron and Reiss, in 1985, in the American Sociological Review, volume 50, attacked the aggregate analyses themselves, the method of the whole approach. Their charge: a rise after a story might be the calendar's artifact, the week's own shape wearing the story's clothes. Phillips and Bollen replied, defending the aggregate method and its corrections. Baron and Reiss rejoined, holding that the calendar, and not the story, produced the shape. The exchange sits at pages 347 to 376 of that volume for any reader who wants the war at the page. The war never ended with a winner, which is why this book calls the crash-specific finding disputed and leaves it there: it came out of the decade unresolved, and unresolved is what it remains. The book's caution never rests on it, because a book that indicted a ledger for certainty it had not earned cannot then rest its rules on a finding in the same condition.

Now to the legend underneath the literature, because the literature's own name for the effect is a legend. The Werther effect

takes its name from Goethe's 1774 novel, whose hero's suicide was said to produce imitations across Europe. Young men read it in their rooms with the door shut, and some of them dressed like him afterward, and the authorities buried the book for the fear of what it woke. The fear had a face long before it had a measurement. That book was banned in places for the deaths it was blamed for, and the blaming was never measured, and the novel's afterlife is the era's lesson: a story can be convicted of killing without a count ever being taken. Two centuries later, the effect wearing Werther's name would be measured in the mortality statistics, which is the difference between the legend and the literature. The story is famous, and its own contagion evidence is legend-thin: the book says so, at the level of the standard scholarship, because the book's method is to check the stories it repeats, including this one. The suicides said to follow the novel were never counted; the bans were real and the bodies were hearsay. The book's sixteenth chapter will ask the same question of the county weekly's formula: what a story does, and what it merely settles. The name survived because the name is good; the evidence was never audited. So this book files the legend as a legend and the findings as findings, and keeps the two apart the way it keeps the trooper's whisper from the certificates. A literature that names itself for a novel is telling on itself, and the telling is noted and set aside, because the modern evidence does not need the legend. The legend's survival is itself a lesson in what this book is about: a good story, told for two hundred years, becomes a fact by repetition, and the lesson is applied to the county weekly's formula later in the book.

Where the question stands now is the consensus, and it is real. In 2020, in the BMJ, volume 368, Niederkrotenthaler and colleagues published a systematic review and meta-analysis of the association between suicide reporting in the media and sui-

cide. The general association is there, in both directions. Reporting that details method or presents suicide as a solution is followed by increases; reporting that emphasizes coping and recovery is followed by decreases. And the meta-analysis's genre matters as much as its finding: a systematic review with a protocol, the accumulated studies pooled by rule, which is the strongest kind of answer the social sciences make. The decreases' side of the finding is the side the guidelines are built from, the evidence that some reporting protects, which is why the guidelines are a public-health instrument and never merely a courtesy. The consensus is real and the consensus is general, and the general is the only thing it is.

Two reviews stand behind this chapter's sentences, and their subjects are kept apart the way the findings are. The 2020 review is about reporting and suicide, the headline's effect on the reader. The 2024 review, the tenth chapter's spine, is about road traffic suicides, the count of the disguised. A reader who merges them has misunderstood both, and the merge is the exact error this chapter exists to prevent: the consensus of the first cannot be spent on the disputes of the second. The book's rules descend from the first; the book's subject lives in the second; and the sentence keeping them apart is this one. Its authors are suicidology's measurement wing, and their finding's two directions are the guideline's whole basis, and the crash road appears in their pooled estimates only as one kind of report among many; it is never the effect's home. That is the settled finding, and this book never uses it to validate the crash-specific effect, which is the disputed one. The distinction holds the chapter up: stories about suicide can move suicide, and whether they move it onto the roads is unresolved, and the trooper's silhouette sits exactly in the unresolved part. The book's rules are built from the settled part, and the disputed part is reported as disputed, and the

two are never braided.

From the consensus grew the guidelines, and they are on the record with their dates. The Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide, maintained by the national organizations that share `https://reportingonsuicide.org`, and the World Health Organization's Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals, in its 2023 update, dated September 12. What they ask, at the level of their known content: no method detail, no simplistic single-cause explanation, no sensationalism or normalization, and help resources included. The WHO resource's purpose is stated in its title's direction, toward prevention, and the Recommendations' purpose is the same on the newsroom's side. Both documents exist because the consensus exists, and the consensus exists because the studies kept finding the same shape. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline's own press guidance gives the line this book carries: for support in the United States, call or text 988. The line is in the front matter, and it rides at the end of every chapter that could be posted alone. It is checked against the service's current guidance and localized for any edition outside the United States, because the form the help takes is the service's to set. Those are the rules a responsible text on this subject follows, and this book follows them, and this chapter is where the book explains why, because the explanation is the evidence. The guidelines are not censorship and the book does not treat them that way; they are the consensus turned into a style sheet, and the style sheet is cheap to follow and expensive to ignore. The editions in force at this writing are the ones named. The guidance moves as the evidence moves, and a book that takes the consensus seriously has to keep taking it.

The Distance Rule was stated in A Note on Evidence before Chapter One, and here it is justified from the evidence. The book keeps the dead at pattern level, because the pattern is the argu-

ment and the individual death is somebody's kitchen. It prints criteria once, as criteria, and never as instructions, because the criteria are the verdict's logic and the instructions would be something else. It never recommends a speed, a road, an object, because the research the chapter just reported is the reason those details stay out. It never stages an act being planned, because the staging is the one form of help this book refuses to give. It keeps every anticipated benefit of concealment separate from any outcome, because a planner's belief that a crash would pay is evidence about the belief and never evidence about the payment. And it keeps every reported belief apart from what happened, because the record of a hope is not the record of an event. The mercy economy's arithmetic is heard, in this book, as a belief the planners held, and it is never printed as a benefit anyone received. And it carries the counter-evidence in the open, that investigations frequently do find intent, in notes, in histories, in prior attempts, and now in the car's memory. Where the sources carry evidence of help sought and lives that continued, the book carries that too, without manufacturing a counterplot. The book's audit asks, of the whole, one named question: what does this book appear to promise a vulnerable person? The audit's answer is built into the text's exclusions, and the exclusions are the parts the reader never sees, which is why the rules are stated here instead. The question is asked of every chapter at assembly, of the endings, of the epigraphs, of the questions for discussion. The author's own audit asks it again. A Note on Sources says plainly that no independent reviewer has conducted one. The audit is the rule's enforcement, because a rule without an audit is a wish. This is the book turning its own rules on itself, and the rules stay at standard weight where they sit, because the evidence for them is the chapter the reader just read.

The era's own press ecology belongs in the account, because the trooper's years had their own media weather. The county weekly printed the formula once, briefly, beside the courthouse news, and the two inches were the town's whole public record of the death. And the wires never carried it, because a lone crash in a small county is not news in the wire's sense. That is one of the era's protections the era never designed: the deaths the research worried about were the publicized ones, and the trooper's deaths were never publicized at all. The wire services moved the famous suicides nationally, and the famous cases are the ones the research found the effect around: the more publicity, the larger the rise, in the abstract's gradient. A Nebraska road death was never famous, and the weekly's two inches were not publicity in the research's sense, and the book does not claim they were. The dailies of the stretch, the Grand Island and Kearney and North Platte and Lincoln and Omaha papers, carried the county deaths in their own registers, and even they were not the national publicity the research measured. His category lived below the research's floor, in the deaths no one broadcast, which is one more reason his proportion can never be recovered: there was no exposure variable to regress against. The research needed publicity, and his deaths had none, and the absence is the era's quiet protection and the era's quiet price at once. The whisper among the troopers was a story about deaths too, retold in the trades, and whether it ever moved a death is unanswerable by the record. A retelling has no circulation figures, and the county weekly's two inches had no measurable audience for despair, and the record's silence here is the kind the book accepts: unknowable is a finding too. What can be said is what the research says: the dispute is about the roads, and the consensus is about the headlines, and the trooper's category sits between them. The category's invisibility protected it from the journal-

ism question too, because a death no one publicizes cannot be imitated, and the disguise, if the disguise existed, was its own quarantine. The sixteenth chapter will show the formula outliving its papers, which is its own kind of evidence, and it is not this chapter's.

The loop the research described deserves a paragraph of its own, because it closes on the book's central object. If the crash-specific effect held, then some of the deaths the county weeklies called accidents were produced by the headlines about such deaths. The ledger would be counting the journalism without knowing it, and the journalism would be reporting the ledger without knowing it. The circle would never be broken by either, because neither could see the mechanism. The trooper's category and the headline's category are the same category: the disguised crash. Whether the headlines fed it is the disputed finding, and the book claims nothing from it. The claim it does make is structural: a ledger that cannot see intent cannot see imitation either, and the invisibility is the same invisibility, whichever way the traffic runs.

One more page of the account belongs to the reader of this book, because the rules run toward the reader too. Nothing in this book describes how a crash is arranged, and the reason is the chapter the reader just finished, and the reason is stated in the open so that the reason can be checked. The reader who wants the method's details will not find them here, and that absence is the book's promise, made where it can be audited. The crisis line rides in the front matter and at the end of every chapter that could be posted alone, per the service's own press guidance. The deaths in this book are real, and the patterns are real, and the book's promise is that neither is dressed as an instruction. The promise is made here, and kept everywhere, and audited at assembly, because a promise about suicide is a promise that has

to be checkable. A book that indicts a ledger for hiding despair cannot then hide its own method, and it does not.

One honest consequence is owed to the trooper, and it gets its due here. His whisper was itself a story about deaths, told once, in an undertone, to a writer. It had no circulation, no dateline, no measurable audience, and no detectable effect, which is exactly what the county weekly's formula did have, and the two are the sixteenth chapter's contrast. Whether his whisper, or the county weeklies' formula, or this book, ever moved a death is unanswerable by the record. The whisper and the formula are the two poles of the book's sixteenth chapter, the myth and the paperwork, and the contagion question is the only question this book asks about itself. It told the truth as gossip and changed nothing; the formula told a settled story as news and settled everything; and which of them moved any death is a question no instrument can answer. And the one certainty is structural: the whisper reached almost no one, while the formula reached everyone in the county, and the research's publicity gradient measures exactly what the formula never had. The crash-specific effect is disputed, and this book reports the dispute and applies the consensus to itself either way, because the cost of being careful is a few paragraphs and the cost of being wrong is not measurable at all. The book would rather be charged with caution than with the other thing. This chapter is the charge sheet, filed in the open, where the hostile reader and the friendly one can both find it, which is the only way the caution can mean anything.

The trooper's question survives the chapter in its corrected shape. His silhouette was the kind of death the imitation research worried about: the lone driver, the night road, the crash that looks like misfortune. He is, in the research's own frame, the disguised end of the disguised effect, the crash the story

would produce if the effect ran on the roads. Whether the headlines fed his roads is unknown and probably unknowable, and the book does not pretend otherwise. What the headlines did to the readers is measured; what they did to the drivers is disputed; what this book does about both is written down here, so that no one can say the rules were hidden. The chapter's finding is the reader's new competence, earned the hard way, through a literature that fought itself for a decade. The settled finding and the disputed one are different findings, with different records and different confidence. The consensus applies to one and never the other, and this book is written the way it is because the difference exists. The reader who holds that distinction can read the whole safety literature without being fooled, which is the competence the chapter exists to install, and the book's chapters are included in that literature's company. That competence is the chapter's gift and the chapter's excuse: the book's rules are now the reader's rules, and the rest of the book can be judged by them, starting with the question's name. That is what the exit holds, and the question's name is next.

The movement's witnesses now stand in their order, and this chapter is the odd one, the witness the book called on itself. The journals knew the question, the method answered it, the examiner priced its answer, and now the headlines have their account. The book's subject can be dangerous to write about, and the writing has rules, and the rules are on the record. What remains is the question's name, and then the countries that look, and the movement closes with the large samples the small old papers never had. The trooper's whisper is still standing, tested and disciplined, and the test so far has not broken him in kind. The discipline so far is the kind the trooper would have recognized: nothing asserted past the record, every label on every claim. The difference between the two kept visible on every

page.

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Chapter Nine

Disguised Suicides?

The document is a criteria list. It is the document the road criteria descend from, the upstream text of the whole classification question, the first page of the road count's family tree, and the tree's roots are in Edinburgh. Every classification this book prints has an ancestor, and the ancestor of the road criteria is a psychiatrist in Edinburgh re-reading her own city's verdicts. The chapter opens on her because the road's count begins with her paper's effect on her own city's statistics. Picture the work itself: one psychiatrist, alone with the files of her own city's dead, reading each verdict against the record of the life, and writing down what the reading moved. It is the loneliest kind of scholarship, and it changed the count. In 1973, in the British Journal of Psychiatry, volume 123, pages 15 to 21, I. M. K. Ovenstone published A psychiatric approach to the diagnosis of suicide and its effect upon the Edinburgh statistics. The citation is verified at its record, and the paper is reported here at the width of the review's tables, because I did not read it at the page. The journal was psychiatry's British house, the volume's year was 1973, and the paper's title carried its own thesis: an effect upon the Edinburgh statistics. The paper's whole claim is in its title's two halves, the approach and the effect, and the effect is the book's subject: the statistics are the same deaths, re-read. She was a psychiatrist reading her own city's ledger, and her approach was to ask, of each equivocal death, what the record would support, and to find the official statistics short. The equivocal deaths were the ones the record could not settle, and her criteria were the attempt to settle them by reading. The

attempt is the same attempt the psychological autopsy was making in Los Angeles, on another continent, in another register, in the same years' spirit.

Her city was Edinburgh, her instrument was the criteria she proposed, and her finding, as the review reports it, was that the official count was an undercount. The undercount's size is the review's to report, and the review's tables carry it, and the point this chapter needs is narrower than any percentage: the count moved when the asking changed, in her own city, on the record. The movement was local, one city's statistics, and the lesson is national, because every city's count is somebody's local reading. The effect upon the Edinburgh statistics is the title's phrase, and it is the whole book in six words: its effect upon the Edinburgh statistics, meaning the deaths were always the same, and the statistics changed when the asking changed. She was re-reading her own city's verdicts, which is the act this book performs on a bigger scale. The Edinburgh statistics moved when the definition moved, which is the finding this chapter is built to carry. The count of these deaths has always depended on the definition in force, and the definitions are on the page in order. The page order is the argument: the reader who follows it can watch the count change hands.

Before 1960 the question has no literature at all, and the silence is worth one paragraph. The car was sixty years old and the road death was sixty years old and no one had asked the question in print, as far as the review's lists record. The question needed three things to be askable: a psychiatry willing to read intent from a scene, a sociology willing to doubt an official count, and a road system deadly enough to make the doubt worth printing. By 1960 all three existed, and the asking started everywhere at once, which is the fifth chapter's simultaneity seen from the definition's side.

Her criteria's content belongs to the third chapter's discipline: they are the ancestor of the road criteria. They are described here at the level of their existence and never at the level of their text, because the text is unread. What the record supports is the shape of the approach. A psychiatrist, given the deaths, asked what a careful reader of the whole record would call suicide, and answered with criteria, and the criteria produced a larger number than the official count had. The criteria were for suicide in general, and the road criteria descended from them, because the road death was the hardest case and the hardest case is where a criteria list earns its keep. The descent is the tenth chapter's spine's ancestry. The ancestry matters because the road count's rules were written by people who had read her, and the reading is the reason the Nordic numbers can be trusted as far as they go. The list's point was that a death's manner could be read from the record and never guessed from the scene. The point is the third chapter's criteria's ancestor, and the ancestor's date is 1973, which is inside the trooper's twenty. The road criteria descend from hers, as the Swedish paper reports at its tables. The line from an Edinburgh psychiatrist's re-reading in 1973 to a Scandinavian transport authority's classification in 2012 is the question's whole institutional history, and it runs through one set of criteria. Forty years separate them, and the forty years are the trooper's era plus the time it took the state to catch up, and the catch-up happened elsewhere.

In the last year of the trooper's twenty, the question got its name. It arrived in the place the whole profession would trip over it, and it arrived late, on another continent, in another profession's language. On October 18, 1980, the British Medical Journal, volume 281, page 1041, carried a one-page paper by Jennifer Jenkins and Peter Sainsbury, and its title asked the trooper's question outright: Single-car road deaths: disguised

suicides? The BMJ was the profession's general weekly, the paper's length was one page, and the page's title was the question, and the question mark was doing the title's honest work. A one-page paper with a question for a title is a probe, and probes are not verdicts. The probe's authors were asking the trooper's question in the form the era allowed, which was the form of doubt about the default. The 1980 date matters to the book's columns: the trooper was leaving the road as the question arrived in print with its own name, and the two never met. His last years on the road were the question's first years in print with its name, and the columns of the fifth chapter hold the overlap, and the overlap's content is zero, because the journal and the ditch never spoke. The years of his career and the years of the naming overlap exactly, and the overlap is the book's claim about the era, that the question and the witness coexisted without ever being introduced. The subtitle of this book spends its word here, in this chapter's title and in the book's epigraph, and nowhere else, because the word is the question's name and the name deserves one home. The paper's figures are not quoted here, because I did not read the page; the citation is verified, the date is the record's, and the title is the argument in five words. What the paper found is stated as the article reported it, and labeled so: that the lone dead carried heavier psychiatric histories and more recent life crises than drivers killed in collisions. The finding is the trooper's profile given a literature address, and it prints as the article's account, and the page waits for the reader who wants it.

The question mark is the honest part. The question mark is also where this book's subtitle comes from, and the spending of the word here is deliberate. Disguised is the question's word, the one the 1980 title printed, and the subtitle of this book carries it forward, and the chapter is its home. The word is spent here

as the book's name for the practice. Where it appears again, it belongs to the sources that coined it or to the trooper's claim it named, because a word that names the accusation should not decorate the pages that weigh it. Three weeks later, on November 8, 1980, the same journal carried a reply letter by M. C. Tweedie under the same title, and the question had its first public argument. A question with a reply letter is a question that arrived, and the exchange is cited here by its records, because the page was not read, and the existence of the argument is the exhibit. The page itself deserves a paragraph, because a one-page paper with a question for a title is a genre with a meaning of its own. The BMJ's single page is correspondence-length: room to name a suspicion, show a small series, and stop before the proof would have to begin. Two clinicians could put the trooper's whole suspicion into print inside it, and did, and the journal's editors put a question mark in the title as the profession's own hedge. The reply letter three weeks later is the same genre's other half: the profession answering itself in the same inch of type. The question lived in that inch for a decade, too small to be worth a study and too persistent to be dropped, and the papers that finally measured it arrived after the trooper's road years were over. The size of the asking is part of the story the chapter tells: a suspicion big enough to print, too small to fund.

The argument's honest defense belongs on the page, because the trooper's question was never proved, and this chapter says so at full volume. In 1982, Sainsbury and Jenkins argued their counter-position, cited here by its record: that the certification errors are random and cancel. That is the strongest honest answer the book has, and it is stated as strongly as the record allows. The claim is that the deaths may be what they seem, and that whatever misreadings exist run in both directions and wash

out. The defense deserves its full shape: if certification errors are random, then a suicide certified as an accident is matched by an accident certified as a suicide, and the totals survive the noise. The defense is what a careful certifier would want to be true, and the book grants the want and tests the claim, and the countries that looked are the test. The want deserves respect: it is the hope that the courthouse never buried the truth by accident, and the hope is the kind of belief the book tests and never mocks. The claim has the shape of the court's presumption, the one Helpern named, and the shape is the reason the default was safe: as long as the errors might be random, the accident box was nobody's fault. The trooper's claim, heard in the courthouse of that defense, would have sounded like an accusation of the arrangement, which is why it was whispered. If it is true, the ledger's noise is noise and the count is safe. If it is false, the errors run toward the accident and the count is a floor. The evidence to decide between them is the countries' evidence, and the tenth chapter carries it, and the answer is not kind to the random-cancel defense, because the countries that looked found the errors running one way. The defense survives only where no one looks, and the looking is the tenth chapter, and the defense does not survive the tenth chapter.

The question spread through the next two decades, and the spreading is the definitions moving. In 1994, Kuroda and Pounder, in the Journal of Traffic Medicine, reported on suicide on the roads of eastern Scotland, in the country of Ovenstone's own city, two decades after her re-reading of its statistics. The question had come home to the place that first measured it, and the home's answer was a percentage, and the percentage was small, and the smallness belongs to the band's low country. The 2024 review reports their figures: 1.5 percent of road fatalities and 1.9 percent of driver fatalities were suicides. The pair is

the band's lower country, the numbers a careful re-reading produces when the asking is conservative, and the difference between them and the Nordic figures is the tenth chapter's map of who was looking. In 1995, Connolly, Cullen, and McTigue, in the journal Crisis, documented single road traffic deaths through four Irish coroners, accident or suicide, as the review lists it. The design is the book's question aimed at the certifier: take the deaths to the people who decided them, and ask what the deciding was. Four coroners in Ireland, and the question was in the room where the verdicts were made, which is the room this whole book wants to sit in. The coroners' answers, reported at the review's width, are the mechanism's supply side: the people who decide, deciding, with the question asked to their faces. The study is cited at its record and the review's listing, and its existence in Ireland is the point: the question was being asked of coroners in their own rooms.

In 1995, Peck and Warner published their intent hypothesis in Adolescence, from brief case studies, with the concept of parasuicide attached. They concluded the hypothesized relationship may be valid, as the record states it. Brief case studies are the weakest evidence the chapter carries, and they are carried at their width, because the book's rule is that the record's width is printed with the record. The venue was a journal of adolescence, and the cases were the young, and the hypothesis was that some of the road's youngest dead had meant it, and the conclusion's modesty is the record's: may be valid. The youngest drivers and the lone crashes meet in the book's questions, and the 1995 paper is the era's attempt to ask them together. The attempt's modesty, may be valid, is the honest width of a brief case study, and the book prints the modesty with the finding, because the two are the same thing.

The article this book expands quoted a sentence of theirs

about concealment. The sentence does not print here, because the page was not read, and the book's rule holds: nothing quotes a page no one has read. The rule costs the book a good sentence, and the cost is the point.

The reviews then moved the definition in the open, which is what reviews are for. A review is a definition with a reference list: it gathers the studies, states what the count is under the gathered definitions, and moves the field's number by moving the field's frame. The field's number moved every time a review landed, and the succession of reviews is the definition's machinery at work, and the machinery's output is the tenth chapter's band. Routley and colleagues' 2003 report from the Monash University Accident Research Centre, number 216, reviewed the field for the transport side. It noted, from the national statistical sites' three-digit reporting, 190 suicides by deliberate crashing of a motor vehicle in the United States for 1999 and 2000. Under a hundred a year, against more than forty thousand annual crash deaths. The X82 code existed and the count was a rounding error, and the rounding error is the official ledger's shape for the trooper's category: present, named, and nearly empty. The Routley report is a road-safety center's document, the transport side's own, and its noticing of the code's emptiness is the transport side discovering what the psychiatric side had always suspected. Under a hundred a year, against more than forty thousand annual crash deaths: the official count's confession, printed in a road-safety center's report. Pompili and colleagues' 2012 comprehensive overview, in Forensic Science International, focused on single-vehicle crashes, and it was the article's candidate source for a two-percent floor. The floor has no source, and no review states one, and this book prints the correction on its own page in the fourteenth chapter. The floor's failure is its own finding, and the ninth chapter's finding holds

it: a number that no review will state is a number that no definition has ever been able to produce.

Imants, Goodsell, and Chevalier's 2022 review, in Traffic Injury Prevention, carried the characteristics and the potential interventions. The interventions' literature is thin in a way the tenth chapter reports, because a prevention aimed at an uncounted death is aimed at nothing. And the 2024 review, Radun, Kannan, Partonen, and Hawton, is the field's spine: fifty-one studies from eleven countries, with its Table 2 the band this book prints. The band runs from half a percent to about ten, and the spread is the definitions' history in one table, because the studies were run under different rules, and the rules are the spread. The tenth chapter walks the spread country by country; this chapter's point is that the spread exists because the definitions differed, and the differences are on the page.

The word autocide exists in the forensic literature. This book uses it without a first-use claim, because the first use was not found and the book does not invent one. The word does what the question's name always did: it makes the thing speakable. The trooper had usually, and the journals had vehicular suicide and subintentioned death and disguised suicide, and the literature now has autocide. Each name was a handle on the same silhouette, and the silhouette never changed while the handles accumulated. The names' timeline is its own evidence, and the evidence is the kind this book trusts: dated, printed, and impossible to unprint. Subintentioned death in 1963, vehicular suicide by 1970, disguised suicides in 1980, autocide by the modern literature: the question kept being renamed because it kept being rediscovered, and things that do not exist do not need renaming. The trooper's own name for it was no name at all, the lowered voice, and the lowered voice is the only name that never made print, and the book's first chapter is where it lives.

The book's subtitle carries the word, and the carrying is deliberate. Disguised Suicide and the Coroner's Verdict: the two halves are the question and the answer's home. The word disguised belongs to the 1980 title, and the word verdict belongs to the courthouse, and the book's argument lives where they meet, in the box where the disguise gets certified. The subtitle spends the word here, in the chapter that asks the question, and the spending is the reason the rest of the book can call the thing by plainer names. The plainest name is the trooper's own, the one he never said: the deaths that meant it, in the cars, at night, alone.

What the definitions do to the count is the chapter's finding, and it is worth stating at full strength. A count is a rule with a number attached. Change the rule and the number moves, and no death anywhere changes. The Edinburgh statistics moved when one psychiatrist re-read them. The Finnish count moved when the teams re-examined the files. The Swedish count moved when the asking deepened inside the five-grade scale the reform had built. The American X82 count never moved, because no one re-read it that this book can find. Each pair of counts is the same deaths under two definitions, and the distance between the pair is the definition's whole content, and the content is the only thing the courthouse ever controlled. The trooper could not change the deaths, and the county attorney could not change the deaths, and either of them could have changed the count, because the count was always the definition's and never the dead's. The trooper knew the deaths and could not touch the count; the county attorney held the count and never saw the deaths; and the definition sat between them, deciding which deaths the count would ever know. Ovenstone's Edinburgh statistics moved when her approach replaced the default. Sweden's road count moved when its five grades replaced

the binary. The official counts the tenth chapter reports moved when the investigation teams looked. The count of these deaths has always depended on the definition in force, which means the count was never a property of the deaths. It was a property of the asking. The finding is the chapter's, and it is stated at full strength because the evidence for it is the strongest kind: the same deaths, counted twice, under two definitions, with the definitions' dates on the page. The trooper's ledger's zero, wherever it reads zero, is a statement about who was asking, and the zero is the thing this book tests.

The chapter's objection is on the page in its own words. The hypothesis was never proved, and this book agrees, and the movement of a question's definition is itself the finding. The finding is the kind the trooper would have recognized from his own roads: the count changed with the asking, and he had watched it change with his own eyes, and no one wrote him down. The trooper's whisper is not vindicated by any of this; what is vindicated is the asking, and the asking is what the whisper and the journals shared.

The trooper's claim is not proved by any of it. Nothing in this chapter shows that any Nebraska death was anything other than what it was called. The names and the reviews and the criteria are evidence about the count, and the trooper's proportion is what the arithmetic chapter and the verdict are for. What the chapter shows is that the question was real enough to rename four times in four decades, and that every renaming came with a count attached, and the count changed every time the definition did. The timing is the book's quiet ache: the question was named while he was still working, and the name never traveled to the counties where the question lived. The county attorney who signed his roads' certificates never knew it. And the knowing would not have mattered, because the definition was

the courthouse's to apply.

The criteria list Sweden later adopted from Ovenstone's criteria is the chapter's close, and the close is stated with its honesty intact. The Swedish road criteria descend from hers, as the 2022 paper reports at its tables, and the wording is now in hand, from Trafikverket's own report of 2014, read at its tables. The criteria are three, and they are screening rules, not verdicts. A spoken or written farewell clearly communicating intent, with suspicious circumstances. Suspicious circumstances with relevant background evidence: a recent attempt, indirect suicidal communication, expressed thoughts or weariness of life, prolonged depression or mental illness, or a recent severe emotional event. Or a traffic event that itself gives strong grounds for suspicion. The 2014 Swedish table names prolonged depression; the 2022 English account includes mental illness as well, and the book keeps the two wordings apart rather than merging them into a quotation that exists in neither. The wording is no longer unread, and the book says so in the close, because the report that carries it is the same report whose tables showed the count move. The criteria came down from Edinburgh, and the papers came down with them, and the count came after. The count always comes after the asking. The book has now carried the question from the ditch to the journal to the name to the definition, and the definition's movement is the count's movement, and the count's movement is what the tenth chapter measures at full size. The descent from Edinburgh to the Nordic roadside is the only genealogy in this book that ends in a count at all, and the count is what the deliberation will weigh.

The three facts sit together the way this whole book sits: what is verified is printed, what is second hand is labeled, and what is unread is said to be unread. The question's name is now spent as the book's word, the word the subtitle carries. The

countries that look are next, the counties' own opposite: the places where the asking was built into the law. The answer will make the trooper's silhouette visible at last, at the width of the biggest samples the question has ever had. The movement closes with the countries because the countries are where the asking was institutional, where someone was paid to look at every fatal crash, and the payment is the difference between a literature and a system. A literature asks when it wants to; a system asks every time; and the trooper's question needed the every-time. The definitions are on the page in order, the names are in their years, and the count's dependence on the asking is now the reader's to hold while the countries produce their numbers. The countries are Finland and Sweden and Australia and the others, and their answers are large. The largeness is the size of what the trooper's county never built the looking for.

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Chapter Ten

The Countries That Look

The document is a five-grade scale, and it is the chapter's first exhibit because it is the thing the trooper's courthouse never had. The scale's existence is the chapter's premise: someone built a way to say I cannot tell, and the building changed the count, which is the proof that the count was always a choice of the asker's tools. The trooper's county worked the binary, accident or suicide, with accident the default, and Sweden's five grades are the design that answers the binary, and the design's answer is the rest of this chapter. A scale with five grades is a confession that the binary was a lie, and the confession is Sweden's gift to the argument. The binary's two boxes were the trooper's problem, and the five grades are the proof the problem was the boxes. Sweden's classification of road deaths, as the 2022 paper reports it and the 2024 review repeats it, reads: certain suicide; strong support for suicide; not possible to determine; an accident nearly certain; certain accident. Five grades where the old system had two, with the middle grade honest about its own limits. The scale is a document of institutional design, and it exists because Sweden decided to look. The looking is this chapter's subject: what countries find when they send someone to look, and what the finding does to the count, and what the count's movement costs the old count's confidence. The scale's five grades are the answer to the binary's failure, and the middle grade, the scale's phrase for evidence that runs out, is the honest box given a grade's dignity. The scale was built for the road deaths, and the road deaths are the ones the binary buried, and the burial's depth is what the 2012 table measures.

What a scale does to a courthouse is the chapter's first lesson, and it is stated before any number. A binary makes the certifier choose a certainty. A five-grade scale lets the certifier say the evidence's truth: certain, supported, unknowable, nearly certain, and the unknowable grade is the one the trooper's category lived in. The trooper's courthouse had two boxes and a default. Sweden built five boxes and sent someone to fill them. The difference between the two designs is the difference between a count and a habit, and the 2012 table is what the difference measures.

Finland is the system with the longest memory. Its investigation teams have worked every fatal road crash since 1968, with a statutory basis from 2001. The team is multidisciplinary by design: policing, medicine, vehicle technology, road maintenance, behavioral science, as the Finnish Crash Data Institute and Salo, Parkkari, Sulander, and Keskinen describe them in 2007. The design's premise is the book's premise: that a fatal crash is a text that needs several professions to read, and that one of the readers must be paid to ask what the driver meant.

The team goes to the scene. The team includes someone whose job is to ask. The design is the sixth chapter's method built into law, and the answer it produces is the longest series of looked-at road deaths anywhere. The series begins in the trooper's own years, which is the fact the book keeps returning to: the looking began while he was still working, in a country with winter roads. The looking's results were printed in the journals of his own decade, and the journals were the fifth chapter's columns, and the columns and the teams were the same era's two answers to the same question. The founding year, 1968, is inside the trooper's era: while he was walking his ditches with a flashlight, Finland was sending a physician and a behavioral scientist to its own ditches. The two pictures

sit side by side in the book's columns, and the columns' white space is the distance between a country that paid for the asking and a county that never thought of it. The statute of 2001 codified what the teams had been doing for three decades, which is the order of a serious country's operations: practice first, law second, and the count honest the whole time. Hernetkoski and Keskinen, in 1998, in Accident Analysis and Prevention, report the share of fatal crashes judged self-destructive rising from 1.1 percent in 1974 to 1975 to 7.4 percent in 1991 to 1992. The rise is inside the same country's own series, with the same teams, which is the cleanest evidence that the count grows with the looking's maturity and never with the deaths' change. The rise inside one country's own series reads as the looking getting better over twenty years, and the book says reads as: different years can carry different deaths, and the same-year comparisons are the ones that prove the method. The review's tables report that the lone crashes were typical of the negligent and the collisions were typical of the suicides, which is the Nordic shape the trooper never saw. The distinction between the two crash shapes, printed in a Finnish series, is the first documentary evidence that the method's results differ by road. The evidence matters more than the percentages.

Öhberg, Penttilä, and Lönnqvist, in 1997, in the British Journal of Psychiatry, gave the series its best-known numbers, all at the abstract's width and the review's tables. All 1,419 driver fatalities in Finland from 1987 to 1991 were reviewed; 99 were flagged as possible suicides; and 84 were judged suicides, 5.9 percent against 2.6 in the official count. The funnel from 1,419 to 99 to 84 is the asking at work, and the 2.6 that the official count had printed is the asking's absence measured. The cases were usually head-on collisions between vehicles of widely different weight, which is the lorry road's shape and not the trooper's.

The funnel matters as much as the finding: 1,419 deaths reviewed, 99 flagged, 84 judged. The judgment required the teams' files, the histories, the witnesses, and the two forensic pathologists' review, which is the sixth chapter's method and the third chapter's criteria joined and paid for. The official count had said 2.6 percent; the looking found 5.9; and the difference between those two numbers is the size of the trooper's category in a country that looked, measured by the people who built the looking. The 2.6 was never the truth and never a lie either; it was the count of what the unasked system could see, and the 5.9 is what the asking found. The distance between them is the question the trooper asked and the county never did, and the question's size is the book's subject measured in two numbers. The authors' own caution is printed with their finding: the misclassification moves the total suicide rate only slightly, because driver suicides are near one percent of all suicides. The caution is the book's limiter and the book's honesty, and it stays on the page, because the claim this book makes is about the crash record's truth and never about the suicide rate's size. The crash record is the road-safety planner's instrument, and the planner's countermeasures are built for accidents, and a count that hides the intentional ones misleads the building, which is the seventh proposition's width, stated here and never widened. The caution stays on the page for the same reason: the count that changes is the crash record's, and the crash record's change is the road-safety planner's loss, and the suicide-prevention planner loses little.

And Radun and colleagues, in 2019, in Traffic Injury Prevention, report the yearly suicide share of fatal crashes running from 11.2 to 17.6 percent. Of the 180 suicides, 138, or 77 percent, were a passenger car crashing into a heavy vehicle. The years after the reform are the count's plateau, and the plateau

sits at one in ten, and the one in ten is the number the trooper's whisper overshot and the county's ledger never saw at all. The 17.6 percent is the highest share any investigating country has found in any year. It is the number the trooper's usually meets at the arithmetic chapter, and it is nowhere near usually, which is the arithmetic of the whisper's error, and the error is honored by being measured. The whisper overshot by more than any certificate could have undershot, and the overshoot is the folklore inversion's other face, the sixteenth chapter's subject. The fifteenth chapter's columns live in that number: the surviving driver's household is the second party the record owes.

The split is the chapter's finding, and it is stated as a finding, with its two explanations beside it. In Finland and Sweden and Norway, the driver suicide usually dies head-on, against a much heavier vehicle; in Australia and the United States, he dies alone against a fixed object. The trooper never saw the Nordic shape because his road had no lorries in the night, and the Australia he never saw had his own shape exactly. The shape's geography is the book's proof that the phenomenon takes the form of the road it uses, and the proof is why the percentages stay home. The first explanation is the shape of the road system: the Nordic two-lane meets heavy lorries, and the American highway meets the empty dark. The second explanation is detectability, and it is the stronger one for this book: a head-on with a surviving truck driver has a witness, and a lone crash has none, and the witness is what lets the question be asked. The two explanations are printed beside each other because the record cannot choose between them. The choice between them is the one the reader now understands: the shape of the road decides what can be proved, and the proof decides the count. The trooper's silhouette is the Anglophone shape, the empty road's shape, and the shape's emptiness is the reason his category was invisible:

no second party, no survivor, no one to ask. The second party is not absent everywhere. On the lorry road there is always another driver. The follow-up studies of that driver, carried at the record's width, report that the professional drivers of the heavy vehicles perceive these collisions as an occupational risk of their own work. And the Nordic numbers are not evidence about his roads. They are evidence about what a system finds when it looks, and the book claims the design; the numbers stay home.

One honesty item belongs here, because the article carried the error and the book corrects it in place. The official Finnish count had filed those cases somewhere, as accidents or as undetermined, and the abstracts I read do not say which, so the book says so: the destination box is unrecorded in what I have read. The article's accident-box claim for Finland is withdrawn, and the withdrawal is printed where the claim stood, because the book's rule is that corrections happen in the open. The claim was the article's error, the kind a careful reading exists to catch, and the catch is recorded here because the corrected book is the book's evidence about evidence. The error's shape is instructive in itself: a claim about which box the deaths left was made from a summary of a summary, and the truth was unrecoverable from the summaries. That is exactly the trooper's complaint about his own ledgers, and the book corrects its own error where the ledgers never had to.

The book's documented accident-box practice stays where the record put it: Whitt's New York office, running on politics. The Missouri of the seventh chapter documents the outcome, a state filing every road death as an accident one year, and never the motive.

Everywhere else the looking went, the route of accommodation was the undetermined box. The undetermined box is the

honest one, and the honesty is the finding the deliberation will weigh. The undetermined route is the documented route of accommodation everywhere the record reaches, and the honest box is where the looking goes when it cannot prove.

Australia is the profile that matches him. Law, Too, Spittal, Pirkis, and Clapperton, in PLOS One, April 30, 2024, read the National Coronial Information System's records from 2001 to 2017: 640 classified road-vehicle-collision suicides on public roads, against 41,890 suicides by other methods. The system is a coroners' system, the reading is of coroners' files, and the article's older sentence about Australia convening its coroners is corrected here for the record's truth: researchers read the coroners' files. The cohort is a classified one, and the chapter says so: a description of the certified; the hidden fraction it never measures. What it describes is the certified cohort's shape, and the shape is the trooper's: drivers, alone, into fixed objects, commonly trees. The 640 and the 41,890 are the ratio that matters for the arithmetic chapter: road-collision suicides against every other method, about 1.5 percent, from a lone-crash road system. The ratio is the only Australia-to-Nebraska transfer this book ever runs, and it is labeled a what-if there, and the fourteenth chapter carries it with the disclaimer on its face. Each descriptive percentage carries its own denominator, and the denominators are printed with them: travel mode was known for 594 of the 640; drivers were 365 of those; and 264 of the drivers, 72 percent, died in single-vehicle collisions. The national rate by this method roughly doubled over the period, from 0.125 to 0.25 per 100,000, while other methods declined. The doubling reads as the method's visibility rising, with the same caution on it: a doubling across years can carry a rise in the deaths themselves, and the same-year reclassifications are the ones the book rests its case on. The visibility's rise is the same phenomenon

Sweden would measure the next year in the other direction: the more carefully a country looks, the more of these deaths it finds, and the finding's size is the asking's size. Australia's shape is the trooper's own, which is why its count matters here: the driver alone, the fixed object, the tree.

The finding is that Australia's coroners were already classifying this many. The question the book asks is how many the certificates missed, and the Queensland study answers at its own width. Yelo and colleagues, in 2021, in Transportation Research Part F, reviewed 761 driver fatalities in Queensland from 2011 to 2015. They found 22 certified suicides, 2.9 percent, rising to 4.7 percent with the possible cases included. And in six of the fourteen possible cases, the coroner's finding was left open or undetermined, which is the honest box in use, in a coroner's country, at the cases' own edges. The Queensland numbers are the band's middle country: more than Scotland's, less than Finland's, and the possible cases left open are the evidence of where the difference lives, in the deaths the evidence could not settle. The coroners who left them open were not failing; they were doing the honest thing with thin evidence, and the thinness is the trooper's road's signature in a coroner's files. The honest box in use, in a coroner's country, is the chapter's second exhibit.

Norway is one study of thirty cases, and it is carried at that width. Breen and colleagues, in 2018, in Forensic Science, Medicine and Pathology, reviewed thirty road suicides and found the Nordic shape again: 81 percent were collisions with another vehicle. Norway's roads are the lorry roads, and its thirty cases are the Nordic pattern's small confirmation, carried here at its size: one study, thirty cases, and never a foundation. The book's weights are honest about Norway: one study, thirty cases, carried comparatively; as a foundation, it carries nothing. The study's shape, twenty-four of the thirty against the big ve-

hicles, is the Nordic pattern at its purest. Its size is its honesty: the country is small, the cases are few, and the printing is at the size's width, because a book that measures the asking has to print each study at the size the asking achieved.

The United Kingdom has the policy document and the empty literature, which is its own kind of finding. A country suspects its count and has never measured it: the suspicion official, the measurement absent. Harrison's 2017 report for the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, Suicides on UK Roads: Lifting the Lid, read at page 29, recommends that the records of road suicides be retained and reported separately. The recommendation is a country's suspicion of its own count made official, and the lid in the title is the metaphor the whole book shares. The Council's report is a policy document and never a measurement, and the distinction is kept because the UK's count of these deaths was never the book's exhibit; its suspicion is. And Okolie and colleagues' 2020 Cochrane review of means restriction for the prevention of suicide on roads found no studies eligible for inclusion. The prevention literature's honest zero: no one has measured whether the prevention works, because the count has never been good enough to measure against. The zero is the book's seventh proposition's null state: the undercount's cost to prevention is claimed only at the width of impaired visibility, and the impairment is real, and the funding chain is unproven.

Then Sweden, which is the principal exhibit, because Sweden is the country that changed its method and printed the before and after. The institutional trail is on the record: the Transport Administration's 2011:128 report recommended the systematic collection of psychosocial information, implemented in 2012, and the 2014:113 report supplies the method's institutional description, both cited at their records. The trail is the design's pa-

perwork: a state decided the road deaths needed asking about, built the asking into the process, and measured the difference the asking made. That is the experiment the whole book needed, and only Sweden ran it at the scale of a national table; Finland's official-against-investigated series and Ovenstone's own re-reading are the same experiment in smaller forms. The decision had a date and the date is 2012, and the before and after of that date is the cleanest experiment in the literature: the same country, the same deaths, two methods, one year.

And the comparison itself is Andersson and Sokolowski's 2022 paper in the Journal of Safety Research, and I read it at its tables, and the table is the chapter's close.

In 2012, classifying the same year's road deaths without the extended psychosocial investigation, Sweden found 22 suicides. With it, Sweden found 36. The undetermined grade fell from 20 to 8. The strongly-supported-accident grade moved from 7 to 5. The certain accidents held at 273. The five grades did their five kinds of work, and the work's geography is visible in the movement. The movement's story is now in the differences: the honest box lost twelve, the near-accident grade lost two, and the suicide count gained fourteen, and no death anywhere changed.

Read the grades the way the chapter's close reads them. The two suicide grades together rose by fourteen, twenty-two into thirty-six. The certain accidents did not move at all. The strongly-supported-accident grade gave up two. The undetermined gave up twelve. The certain accidents' stillness, 273 both ways, is consistent with the method finding suicides where they had always been filed, in the box that admitted it could not say, and not inventing them from true accidents. It is consistency and never proof, because a still total can hide movements in both directions, and the book says so. The method's own account is the stronger evidence, and the stillness answers anyone

who would read the method as a manufacturing of doubt. The box admitted it could not say, and the count rose when someone was sent to say it for them. That is the whole of the trooper's case against the binary: the binary could not say I cannot tell, and so it never did, and the count kept the silence it was built to keep. Every grade's movement is small enough to be read by hand, and the movement came out of the box that was honest about not knowing. The 273 who stayed are the year's certain accidents as the method found them, and their stillness is consistent with the method finding what it looked for and not just printing doubt onto everyone. The share of road deaths classified as suicide rose from 6.8 percent to 11.2 percent, and the years after averaged about ten percent. The rise is the authors' own 63 percent, and the count's new level held, and the holding is the proof the change was the method and never the year. The increase came, in the authors' own words, almost entirely from the undetermined grade. The authors' inference that twelve of the twenty undetermined were suicides is printed as theirs, because the table gives category totals and never the path of one death. The table's honesty is the book's honesty: the grades moved, the accidents held, and the undetermined emptied, and no one death is followed from one cell to another, because the totals are all the record holds. The certain accidents did not move. The honest box emptied into the count. That is what looking does.

The authors' own inference is printed as theirs, and the printing's label matters: they infer that twelve of the twenty undetermined deaths of 2012 were suicides. The book prints it as the authors' inference and never as the table's fact, because the table gives category totals and never the path of one death. The inference is the strongest reading the evidence supports, and it is still an inference, and the difference between an inference and a count is the difference this whole book was written to keep

visible. Sweden's own reading of its own table is allowed to be wrong, and the book reports it and labels it, and the label is the lesson.

The spread across the literature is the movement's last number, and it is verified at the review's page. Radun and colleagues' Table 2 gives the proportion of road deaths thought to be suicides running from 0.5 percent to about ten percent across national databases, with the Finnish series reaching 17.6 percent in a single year. The spread is wide because the definitions differ, the ninth chapter's finding, and the high end belongs to the countries that look hardest, which is the spread's whole meaning: the number is the method, and the method is the number. Ahlm's 3.1 percent is the pre-reform re-analysis of Sweden's 1999, carried at the review's width. The spread is the confession, and the confession is the chapter's answer: the count tracks the looking. The countries that never looked have the low numbers, and the countries that look have the high ones, and the difference between them is the size of what the trooper's courthouse, on this record, never saw.

The armor goes on the page with the numbers, because the numbers are the place the armor is needed. The hostile reader's charge writes itself: that this book cherry-picked the highest estimates from the countries that look hardest. The charge is answered by the book's rule: the Nordic numbers are never transferred, the band's ends are printed with their denominators, and the spread is reported as a spread. The reasons for the spread are on the page beside it, because a spread without its reasons is the kind of number this book was written to refuse. The rule's cost is the chapter's honesty: the book gives up the Nordic numbers' power in order to keep the design's. The trade is the book's method in one paragraph. Finland and Sweden are not Nebraska, and the book says so: the design transfers

even where the numbers cannot. The chapter's finding, that the method changes shape by road and by detectability, is the proof that the book claims only the design.

The Nordic percentages are never transferred to Nebraska anywhere in this book. The reason is the split itself: the Nordic numbers come from the lorry road, and the lorry road is not the trooper's road. The design that transfers is the design that looks, which is all the book ever claims for it. The transfer the book refuses is the transfer the article's critics feared, and the refusal is printed where the fear would look for it. What transfers is the question of the honest box: who fills it, with what evidence, and with what default.

The second party is priced in one beat here and weighed in the fifteenth chapter's columns: on the lorry road, the other driver lives under the record too. And the movement's point is this. Looking raises the count, and where it has been measured it does so by resolving the honest box, which is why Nebraska's honest box, and who fills it, is the question the deliberation must answer. The movement has now heard the journals, the method, the examiner, the headline, the name, and the countries, and the witnesses agree: the trooper was right in kind. The magnitude is the deliberation's, and the honest box is the verdict's shape, and the magnitude's honest answer is the arithmetic chapter's exercise and never this chapter's. The second movement ends here, with the large samples the small old papers never had, and the deliberation begins with what they proved and what they could not.

The movement closes with the question handed over intact. The handoff is the movement's discipline: the countries proved the count moves, and they could not move Nebraska's, because Nebraska's was never theirs to ask. Every system in this movement that found more had first been sent to look. The sending is

the lesson the verdict inherits: the count's size follows the asking, and the asking is a decision, and the decision is the book's subject to the last page.

The 2012 table is the close. Twenty-two became thirty-six; twenty became eight; seven became five; and 273 stayed 273. The numbers are small enough to check by hand, and the hand-checking is the point: a reader can verify the experiment's claim on one page, which is more than any Nebraska county ever offered. The trooper's own count of his own roads was never checkable at all. That is the difference the movement has now measured. Between a claim and a table; between a whisper and a count; between his twenty years and Sweden's one; between the county that never asked and the country that sent someone to ask. The difference is the movement's yield, and the deliberation inherits it. The four shifts are the experiment, and the stillness of the last one is the sign it was looking and not relabeling. A method that found more suicides by finding more of everything would be no method at all; the certain accidents' stillness is the check the experiment carries inside itself. The deaths were the same deaths. The count changed because someone was sent to look, and what moved was the undetermined, and what the undetermined held was the trooper's category, measured at last, in another country, by a system that asked. The category that was never countable in his counties was countable in Sweden the moment Sweden decided to count it. That is the whole book's argument about the count, and the argument is now the reader's to hold with the table in view, and the deliberation opens with it held. It was never the deaths that were unknowable; it was the asking that was absent. The trooper's silhouette was countable all along, and the counting started the day someone was sent to the family. The sending is the difference the record demonstrates between his zero and Sweden's

eleven percent, with the roads' own shapes beside it. The question the deliberation must answer is now the only one left: what Nebraska's count would show if anyone ever looked. The arithmetic chapter's exercise is the only honest way to ask it.

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Movement III. The Deliberation

Chapter Eleven

Mercy Had Its Own Box

The document is a statute's title, and the title is the oldest evidence this book has. The oldest evidence is the chapter's argument in miniature: the mercy has a history, and the history has dates, and the dates are the proof that the protecting was built, and built long before the trooper's road. The Burial of Suicide Act 1823: the Parliament of the United Kingdom, in the fourth year of George the Fourth, legislating about where a suicide could be buried. The act is cited by its title, at the level of standard legal history, because I did not read its text. The title is enough: a Parliament had to spend a statute on the burial of the dead by their own hands, and the spending is the record of the punishment it repealed. The repeal's date is the price list's first retirement date, and the retirement is the proof that the punishment was felt as a price. What the statute ended, as the standard histories describe it, was the requirement that such a burial happen at a crossroads, in the night, with the body staked. The punishment had been public, and the public had watched, and the watching was the price the family paid. The price was the mercy's reason for existing: someone had to make it stop, and the someone was the coroner's jury, and the jury's tool was the verdict. The Burial of Suicide Act is the book's oldest document, and its age is the chapter's first answer to the trooper's era. The answer's date is the chapter's premise: the mercy was built, and built long before the road. The building's dates are the price list's, and the price list is the deliberation's first exhibit, the kindness's own itemized history, the county's oldest running document. The mercy's box was old when the courthouse

was built, and the courthouse inherited it, and the inheritance is the design's oldest layer, and the layer is the courthouse's oldest habit, older than any statute the fourth chapter printed. The layer's date is the answer to the era's defense of itself. The arrangement was never modern, and its mercy was never new, and the age of both is the chapter's finding.

The punishment was old before it was statutory. Under the law the English coroners' juries worked in, a suicide was felo de se, a felony of the self. The felony carried the forfeiture of the family's goods and, for centuries, the burial at a crossroads with the stake through the body. The forfeiture was the Crown's, and the family's poverty followed the verdict, and the burial's shame followed the widow to church. She stood in that church knowing what the whole parish knew, and the parish knew because the law had told it. The verdict did not just mark the dead man. It marked her, and it marked the children at her side. The juries that sat on such deaths were the family's neighbors, and the neighbors had the mercy box, and the box was the insanity verdict. The jury's twelve neighbors and the verdict's one word are the machine's oldest moving parts. The parts ran the same way for centuries: the decider was local, the family was known, and the verdict was the kindness the law could afford, and the affordability was the system's explanation of itself. The affordability is the design's whole logic, and the logic is the trooper's era's own, and the era's counties are the design's newest heirs. The county attorney of the trooper's era is the jury's own descendant: a local man with a box and a family to answer to. The box is the mercy's, and the mercy is the price list's, and the price list is this chapter's exhibit. The exhibit is the answer to the book's oldest question: what the county was built to protect, and what the protection cost, and the answer's age is the finding the deliberation inherits from this chapter, the kindness's

own dated history. A madman's death was a misfortune, and a misfortune forfeited nothing, and the widow kept the goods and the churchyard took the body. The Forfeiture Act 1870 ended the goods' forfeiture by its title, and the Burial of Suicide Act 1823 had already ended the crossroads, and the two titles are the price list's abolition dates.

MacDonald and Murphy's Sleepless Souls, the standard scholarship of early modern England, is the book's source here, cited to the work and never to a verdict I have not seen. It is labeled a historical analogy wherever the book uses it, and the label matters. The analogy is evidence about a system's shape, and never about Nebraska's practice, and the difference between the two is the difference the whole book exists to keep. What the scholarship describes is the mercy the juries learned: they returned non compos mentis, the jury's own words for a mind gone, so the Crown left a widow her goods and the churchyard kept the body. The merciful verdict is older than the automobile by centuries, and it was never about the dead. It was about the widow, the goods, the burial, the congregation, the parish's peace. The coroner's jury had its own box, and the box was called madness.

The analogy's limits deserve their own sentence, because the book uses the history honestly or not at all. The English juries' mercy ran on the Crown's forfeiture and the churchyard's refusal, and the trooper's Nebraska had neither: no forfeiture, no crossroads, and no recovered rule about the burial. What survived into his era was the clause and the congregation's peace, and the mercy's shape, which is the thing the analogy carries: a local decider with a box and a family to answer to. The analogy is a map of the mechanism's age, and the map is not the territory, and the book never confuses them.

The church's side of the price list has its own dated history,

and the dates matter to the trooper's era. Under the 1917 Code of Canon Law, ecclesiastical burial was denied to those who killed themselves by deliberate counsel. The code is cited as standard scholarship describes it, to a commentary, and never to a Latin text I have not seen, because the book's rule is that a text unread is a text unquoted. The Code was the Catholic Church's own statute book, and the deliberate-counsel test is the era's own name for intent. The exception for signs of repentance is the mercy's own door inside the rule: the dying man's last signs could carry him back into the churchyard. The judgment of the signs belonged to the local clergy, and the local clergy knew the family. The knowing was the mercy's oldest form: the decider and the decided were neighbors, and the verdict bent toward what the neighbors could bear, and the bearing's shape is the coroner's jury's own history, the insanity verdict's long practice. The 1917 rule was in force for most of the trooper's era, and the era's certifiers were the era's priests as much as its coroners.

Under the 1983 Code, verified at the Vatican's own text, canon 1184 lists those to be denied ecclesiastical funerals. It does not name suicide, and it sends doubt to the local ordinary. The church's rule changed between the trooper's years and now: the 1917 rule was in force while he worked, and the 1983 rule is the one in force since. The change's date matters to the era's price list: a family in 1980 and a family in 1990 faced different rules, and the trooper's deaths were all on the older side of the line. What the Protestant churches of a Nebraska town would have done in the 1960s through the 1980s is not recovered, and the chapter says so. The rules the Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches of the era applied are unreached by me, and the article's sentence that an accident verdict spared a congregation awkwardness is stated as the article's own and never as a finding. One dated Protestant text now stands in the record,

and it is background and never Nebraska practice. In 1945, in the Concordia Theological Monthly, a Lutheran pastor named Duemling argued for it. A funeral could be held where the death was judged the work of a disturbed mind or a fever. It should be refused where it was judged deliberate and unrepentant. The judgment he describes is the book's own judgment in a pastor's voice, dated, and never a rule, and never a town in this book. The silence is the record's: the denominations' pastoral handbooks of the era were not reached, and the book does not guess at them, because the guess is exactly the kind of certainty the book exists to refuse.

What the record cannot read deserves its own accounting, because the price list's unread lines are the trooper's era's own. What a Nebraska pastor said at such a funeral. What a county's congregation understood. And what a widow was told. What the adjuster paid without asking. None of it is in the record I reached, and the book prints none of it. The price list's existence is the finding, and the unread lines are the era's own contribution to the ledger's silence, and the silence is priced in the fifteenth chapter's columns like everything else. What the record can still read is the price list's existence, and the price list is the finding.

The insurance history is one paragraph that opens the door to the chapter's close, because the money mechanism has the cleanest paper trail of any of them. In 1898, in Ritter v. Mutual Life Insurance Co., 169 U.S. 139, Justice Harlan held that where the insured, of sound mind, took his own life, the policy would not pay even without a suicide clause. The reason he gave is the mercy economy named by the Supreme Court: a promise to pay in that event would tempt a man to die to provide for his dependents. The dependent is the widow, and the temptation is the arithmetic the trooper's whisper always ran on, and

the arithmetic's date, 1898, is the proof that the county's mercy had a statutory shape before the trooper was born. The temptation is the insurance problem's whole shape, and the shape is the reason the clause exists. The clause is the reason the trooper's widow's arithmetic was a public arithmetic: the policy's own terms made the manner of death a money question, and the money question was the county's to answer. Harlan's holding is the book's oldest American evidence that the ledger's incentive was understood at the top of the law, and the understanding's date, 1898, puts it a generation before the trooper's first ditch.

Four years later, in Knights Templars' and Masons' Life Indemnity Co. v. Jarman, 187 U.S. 197, decided December 8, 1902, the Court applied Missouri's statute barring suicide as a defense unless the suicide was contemplated when the policy was written. The Court rejected the proposed sane-and-insane limitation and affirmed the beneficiary's recovery, and the opinion reproduces an 1885 policy provision, which is the printed clause this chapter closes on. The provision is the era's policy in its own words, and the case is the proof that the suicide defense was contested ground from the beginning. The contest was always about the same thing: whether the insurer could refuse the widow because the husband meant it. The answer the courts kept giving was that the clause controlled the refusal, and the court's mercy stayed out of it. The clause's arithmetic is why the trooper's whisper always ended at the same arithmetic: the certificate's word was worth money, and the money was the widow's, and the widow's need was the mercy box's whole justification.

And in 1920, in Northwestern Mutual Life v. Johnson, 254 U.S. 96, Justice Holmes held that an incontestability clause after one year bars the suicide defense, that public policy on such contracts belongs to the states, and that Ritter is qualified to its

facts. The settlement between Ritter and Johnson is the standard clause of one or two years: after the window, the policy pays regardless, and inside the window, the manner of death is the question. The window's years are the years the mercy box was busiest in, and the trooper's era sat squarely inside the window's era, and the clause's arithmetic is the arithmetic his whisper always ran on. The double indemnity rider's history is the standard legal history's, described here without quotation. The rider's name is the culture's own joke about the arithmetic, and the arithmetic's shape is the same in the noir novel and in the county ledger: the manner of death is a clause's trigger.

The standard provisions that carried the clause into the era's policies are the Armstrong era's own settlement, described at the level of standard legal history without quotation. The settlement is worth one paragraph of plain terms, because the era's arithmetic ran on it. After the early cases voided suicide clauses as against public policy, the insurers stopped refusing to write the risk and started pricing it. Coverage would be written on every life, and the suicide defense would lapse after a fixed term, two years in the era's standard form. The compromise is the mercy economy's own constitution: the industry conceded that a man could not be watched forever, and reserved the right to doubt him for a while. The clause's window is where suspicion's error is most expensive, because the doubt is freshest there, and where the disguise's protection is most valuable, because the payout is safest there after the window closes. Every party to the trooper's county had read that constitution, whether or not they had ever seen it written down. The settlement's date is the era's own: the clause was old when the trooper worked, and the clause is young enough now to be in force still, and the force's survival is the mercy economy's own continuity, the arithmetic unretired. The trigger is worth money, and the money is the

mercy's price, and the price is the only item on the list that was ever itemized for anyone.

Nebraska's own current law keeps the two money mechanisms distinct, and the distinction is verified at the statutes' pages. Section 44-503(2) forbids the suicide restriction in ordinary life policies beyond two years from the policy date. Section 44-502(5) lets additional accidental-death benefits stand outside the incontestability provision. The two mechanisms are the two money questions: the life policy's promise, protected from the suicide defense after two years by statute, and the accidental-death benefit, the double payment, standing outside that protection. The certificate's manner could, in design, bear on the second kind. Whether a certificate's manner ever controlled an insurer's decision is a question I could not answer, and the book says so. The answer is the fact the mercy economy stands on, and the record does not hold it, and the holding's absence is the kind of silence the book prints as a silence and never fills with a guess. The guess would be the book's mercy box, and the book refuses its own method.

The era's own price list comes next. The clause's window is where his deaths lived, and the window is the era's arithmetic, the one his whisper always ran on without ever naming it. A policy two years old paid regardless of manner; a policy young inside the window fought the manner, and the accidental-death benefit doubled the stake. The widow of a man dead on the road in 1975 held whichever of those her husband had bought, and the certificate's one word decided which, and the county attorney who selected the manner held her arithmetic in his pen. The design's mercy was never abstract: it was a number with a dollar sign, and the number's size is the reason the box was worth bending, and the bending is what the trooper's whisper always alleged without ever pricing.

The culture's memory of the arithmetic is Double Indemnity. Cain's novel was serialized in 1936, collected in 1943, filmed in 1944, and the plot runs the fraud the other way: murder staged as accident for the rider. The inversion is acknowledged on the page: the culture's famous case is the fake accident staged for money, and the trooper's category is the real one never staged at all. The difference between the fraud and the despair is the difference between the insurance company's nightmare and the county's mercy. The claims man's actuarial speech in the book of it is noted under the Distance Rule and never quoted as a how-to, because the speech's arithmetic is the trooper's widow's arithmetic. The book's rule about the road's details covers the speech, and the speech's existence in the culture is the culture's proof that the arithmetic was common knowledge, priced into every policy and every plot. The culture knew what the clause was worth, and the knowledge is the era's common sense, and the trooper's widow lived inside it, whether or not she ever read a word of Cain.

The planners' side enters at pattern level and once, and it enters as belief and never as outcome. Hamburger's 1969 patient, as the 2024 review reports him, considered the road because it would spare his family the stigma, secure the insurance, and be quick. Those are the man's stated beliefs as a review reports them, and nothing about whether they would have worked is claimed or knowable. The belief is the mercy economy's supply side: the planner believed the verdict controlled the money and the burial, and the belief's existence is all this chapter needs from him, and his outcome is the book's business nowhere.

Norman and colleagues' 2023 respondents, in BJPsych Open, at the record's width, described the same considerations: the method that would look like an accident, the family spared, the insurance secured. The respondents are this decade's planners,

and the considerations' continuity across fifty-four years is the mercy economy's persistence measured at both ends. The planners' beliefs are evidence about belief, and the Distance Rule keeps them there: no anticipated benefit of concealment is presented as a benefit achieved, and no person's reported hope is printed as a thing that happened. The mercy economy's price list is the record of what the planner believed the verdict controlled, and the record is real, and the record is not a manual. The Distance Rule's own audit of this passage is on the record: the beliefs are printed as beliefs, the outcomes are never claimed. The book's effect on a vulnerable reader is weighed at assembly against exactly this kind of passage. The weighing is the rule's enforcement, and a hope without an enforcement is a wish, and the rule is a rule because it is enforced. The weighing's answer is the counter-evidence the book carries everywhere: the record is full of help sought and lives continued, and the help is real, and the number is real, and it is 988.

The documented interests of the trooper's world are described separately from their documents, and no room is staged for them. The county attorney who lived in the county and answered to the widow's neighbors. The pastor with the burial to conduct. The adjuster with the clause to read. The widow with the children to raise. None of them is a person in this book; they are positions the law and the church and the policy created, and the book never invents the encounter where they met. The county attorney's interest is the office's peace, and the office's peace is the county's, which is why the mercy was never a scandal: it was the arrangement working as everyone in the room needed it to work. The pastor's interest is the family's comfort and the rule's honor at once. The adjuster's interest is the clause's terms. The widow's interest is everything else, and the everything-else is the reason the mercy box existed, and the in-

terests' alignment is the thing no one had to conspire to achieve. The alignment is the mechanism's own engine: no one had to be told to bend the verdict, because every interest in the room bent the same way. The box's mercy was the room's own relief, and the relief is the reason the trooper's whisper was always about the paperwork and never about the people, and the paperwork is where the mercy left its fingerprints. The fingerprints are the count's gaps, and the gaps are the arithmetic chapter's inputs, and the arithmetic is the deliberation's evidence, and the evidence is the kindness's price, finally printed.

What the record shows is the structure they stood inside: the felony's forfeiture, the church's burial rule, the policy's clause, the congregation's peace. The structure's parts are dated, and the dates are the proof of the protecting's age. 1823 for the burial. 1870 for the goods. 1898 for the clause. 1902 for the statute. 1920 for the incontestability. And the two Nebraska sections for the present tense. The whole of it predates and postdates the automobile on every side, and the dates' spread across two centuries is the answer to anyone who would read the mercy as the road's invention. The road inherited the mercy; the mercy was never the road's; and the inheritance is the reason the road's ledger was the mercy's newest and never its home. The threshold was written by people who had to live under it; the author's The One-Way Drop is this book's kin on that ground, and the kin is named once here, where the threshold's price is the subject.

The mercy's direction comes next, because the mercy and the suspicion are two stories told about the same wreck, and the book keeps them apart everywhere except here. The whisper said: he meant it, and the paperwork hid it. The verdict said: he lost control, and the paperwork settled it. The two stories attach to the same ambiguous track, and the record favors the whisper in a minority of cases, and the verdict's mercy is the

story the county could afford. The fifteenth chapter weighs the two stories' prices; this chapter's point is only that the mercy's price list is centuries old and itemized, and the suspicion's price is real too, and both are on the record. The whisper's price was the widow's truth, and the verdict's price was the count's truth, and the county could only afford one, and the one it could afford was the widow's. The county's choice is the design's answer to the book's second question: whether mercy was the motive. The answer the record allows is that the mercy was real and old and priced, and whether it bent any Nebraska verdict is what the inquest cannot settle from the outside. The outside is all this book has, and the book says so, and the saying is the chapter's honesty.

The kindness gets its own honest paragraph here, because the book's rule is that the mercy gets its full weight before the count gets its price. Mercy is a kindness, and the chapter agrees without hesitation. A widow keeping the insurance is a good thing; a congregation burying its dead is a good thing; a son believing his father was unlucky is a good thing. The goodness of the items is the argument's hardest part, because the book's case is that the kindness had a price, and the price is the count. The count's price was paid by people who never knew they were paying, and the unknowing is the whole mechanism's elegance: the mercy was real, and the cost was real, and neither was ever on the same page.

The chapter does not argue the kindness out of existence. It prices it, which is a different act, and the pricing is the book's method applied to the kindest thing in it. The kindness is never mocked in this book, because the book is written by someone who grew up where the kindness was practiced, and the practice's decency is the reason its price went uncounted for so long. The uncounting is the ledger's mercy to itself: a kindness with

no invoice is a kindness no one has to defend, and the defending is what the pricing forces, which is the chapter's reason for existing. The pricing is the respect the record is owed, and the respect is the book's answer to the critic who would call it unkind. The county that practiced it was my own, and the practice's beneficiaries were my neighbors, and the book's hostility to the design is my own hostility to the silence, and never to the people the silence was for. The kindness's items are real: the insurance, the burial, the son's belief, the congregation's peace, and the peace of the man who signed the certificate, who had his own arithmetic and his own neighbors to answer to. The signer is the one interest in the room whose name is on the record. The record is the certificate, and the certificate's one word is the whole economy's trigger, which is why the box was the prosecutor's to fill. The prosecutor's pen is the fourth chapter's subject, and the pen's arithmetic is this chapter's, and the arithmetic's price is the count's silence. Here the kindness is only priced: the protecting is older than the automobile by centuries, and it has always had a price list, and the reader now knows which lines of it the record can still read. The prices are real too: the count's silence, the planner's blindness, the next family's answerless grief. And the two lists are the book's subject, and the subject's difficulty is that both lists are true. The pricing of them against each other is the fifteenth chapter's work.

The count is the mercy's invoice, and the road keeps the rest of the bill. The payers are the fifteenth chapter's two columns: the family's grief on one side, the planner's blindness on the other. What the whisper always said is now priced: the suspicion that the count was the price, that the mercy was paid in the ledger's silence. The payer of record was the next family, whose own midnight was still coming, and the price the next family paid for the last family's mercy is the deliberation's own

subject. The price list is dated, and the dates are the chapter's answer to the whisper's age: the mercy was old before the road was new.

The close is the printed clause, because the clause is the one piece of the mercy economy the book can quote from a primary document. The mercy's history is told from statutes and opinions and the Vatican's own text, and the telling's sources are dated, and the dates are the price list's. The clause's exact words are in the Tables with their source. The chapter closes on the clause's existence: the mercy had a price, the price had a printed clause, and the clause was in the contract the trooper's widow's husband signed. A Missouri widow sued on that clause and won, because her state had written the counter-clause into statute. The insurer reserved the right to call the death a suicide and keep the money, and the county kept the right to call it an accident and keep the peace. Both reservations were printed, and both were the mercy's arithmetic. The clause is the price list's last line. The signature on that contract is the mercy economy's oldest American document, and the document is the proof that the arithmetic was always the widow's, and never the ledger's.

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Chapter Twelve

The Ledger Was Negotiated

The document is a table of numbers, and the numbers were made. In 1897 Émile Durkheim published Suicide, and the book is built on the official statistics of Europe.

The tables in it are the founding text of the count as a sociological fact. The founding text's weakness is the founding irony this chapter is built on: the tables measured what the coroners filed, and the coroners' filing was the measurement's real content. What the tables really measured was the coroners' filing. The count was always made, and it was made by the coroner. This chapter cites it as a work and paraphrases it at the level of standard scholarship, without page quotation, because I did not read it at the page.

What the standard scholarship carries is the founding irony. The book that made suicide a sociological fact made it from the counts the coroners of Europe supplied, and the coroners' practices were inside the numbers the whole time. Durkheim's tables compared the countries' rates and argued the rates measured the societies; the tables' own sources were the registration systems of the states, and the systems' practices were the rates' own authors. Durkheim knew it and wrote around it; the scholarship of the century after him made the knowing its own subject. The suicide rate, it turns out, is not a thing found in the world. It is a thing made at a desk, by a decider, inside an institution, and the institution is on the page. The page is this chapter's subject: who makes a suicide rate, and how, and with what mercy built in. The trooper's claim depends on the answer, because his claim was always that the count was made by someone. The someone

was the county attorney, and the county attorney's count is the count this book indicted without ever convicting him, which is the book's discipline stated from the sociology's side: the system, and never the man.

The count's history has its own historian.

Ian Hacking's phrase is the avalanche of printed numbers. It comes from his 1982 paper in Humanities in Society and recurs in The Taming of Chance, 1990, both cited as works at their records. The phrase names the count's history: the states printed the numbers, and the numbers governed the states. The avalanche is the reason the suicide rate exists as a fact at all, and the fact's manufacture is the chapter's subject. The historian of the count is on the record with the phrase, and the phrase names the history. The title is the reason the count can be read as a thing with a history at all, which is the book's premise. The premise is this chapter's ground: the count has a history, and the history is the history of the coroner's practice. The practice's history is the count's content, and the content is the book's subject: the count as a thing made by the people who filed it. The people who filed were the people who produced the count. The coroners' filing is the founding irony's resolution. The nineteenth century's states discovered that printing numbers was a way of governing, and the avalanche is the modern state's own account of itself. The avalanche's machinery had a schedule: the international list of causes of death was revised in rounds, decade by decade, and each revision re-negotiated what the count contained. The second chapter carried the coding history: the code that named suicide by crashing of motor vehicle from 1979, and its successor of 1999. The codes' dates are the negotiation's dates. A code's arrival is a round of the negotiation closing, the closing's date is on the page, and the page is the count's treaty text. The suicide rate was one of the avalanche's

first products, and the rate's production was never the measuring of a thing the way a thermometer measures a fever. It was the filing of a decision, by a coroner, under a rule, inside a practice, and the practice's history is the count's history. That is the reason this book's subject has a sociology at all, and the sociology is the chapter's content.

Jack Douglas published The Social Meanings of Suicide in 1967. He argued, at the level of his book's argument, that official suicide statistics are produced by the practices of the officials who produce them. The meanings of his title were the officials' own, situated in the practices that produced them: a verdict was a meaning the decider's own setting had made available, and the setting's repertoire was the era's real criterion. The statement's date is the middle of the trooper's era, 1967, and the counties were certifying the whole time. The argument is the era's answer to Durkheim's tables: the count is made, and the making is the coroner's practice. The practice is the count's real content, and the content is what the count measures, which is the book's claim about the ledger's sociology. The sociology is the reason the count can be doubted at all, because a count that was only measured could only be checked, and a count that is made can be made differently. That difference is the history of the count's reform, and the 1988 criteria exist because of it. The criteria's existence answers the question of the trooper's era: the count was always negotiated, and the negotiation was always known. The knowing was never connected to the counties, and the counties' own ignorance of the negotiation is the reason the count's shape never changed there. That is the fourth chapter's finding read from the sociology's side. The side's agreement with the machine is the chapter's proof that the count was made the same way everywhere it was made carelessly. That carelessness is the lesson of the count's history, and it is the reason the ver-

dict can be returned at all.

Maxwell Atkinson, in Discovering Suicide, 1978, described the coroners' own common-sense theories of what a suicide looks like, the unwritten criteria the verdicts ran on. The description is the book's subject stated from the coroner's side of the desk: the certifier's common sense is the era's real criterion, and the criterion's content was never written down. The content, as the scholarship carries it, was biographical: the coroners read the dead person's life for the cues a suicide was supposed to leave, and the cues' list lived in the practice and never in a statute. A count that runs on unwritten cues is a count that changes when the cues change, and the cues' history is the count's hidden history.

I want the reader to see the person inside the sociology, because the sociology can read bloodless and it never was. The coroner at the kitchen table, in Atkinson's England and in the counties this book is about, was a man across from a widow at the worst hour of her life. He had a box to check and a parish watching. The unwritten criteria were written in that room, in his chest, before they were ever written anywhere else. What a suicide looked like, to him, was partly what it would do to her. The sociology of the count is made of rooms like that one, thousands of them, each with its own hour and its own widow, and the rate that came out of all of them carried all of them. That is what the negotiated ledger means when it leaves the journals: a family at a table, and a man deciding what he can bear to write. The country's statistics moved a tenth of a point on what he decided. That is why the count's history is the history of what a suicide looked like to the person deciding, and the look is the era's real law, and the law is what the count measured. Douglas and Atkinson are cited as works and paraphrased at the level of standard scholarship, and I say so. The argument's shape is the

book's: the count is made, and the making is the subject.

The examiner's own county said it first, in print, in a sentence this book prints once and owns here. Kunitz and Edland, in the Journal of Forensic Sciences in 1973, opened their study of autopsies in Monroe County by carrying a claim they credit to others. The claim: official statistics tell us more about the producers of such statistics than about the reality they are presumed to describe. Then they state their own sentence, quoted from the publisher's page: "Suicide rates tell us as much about the coroner or medical examiner system as about those committing suicide." That is this book's thesis in a certifier's own words. The certifier is the seventh chapter's witness, the study's subject was his own county, and the study's numbers showed the system deciding what it measured. Edland was the seventh chapter's witness, and Kunitz and Edland's 1973 opening is the book's thesis in two sentences, printed by a certifier, three years after his own chapter, on the record of the county he ran. The negotiated ledger had its own authors, and they said so.

The same year, across the Atlantic, the negotiation was demonstrated in a single city. In 1973, in the British Journal of Psychiatry, I. M. K. Ovenstone published A psychiatric approach to the diagnosis of suicide and its effect upon the Edinburgh statistics, cited here by its verified record and reported at the review's width, because I did not read it at the page. The ninth chapter carries her criteria as a document and says what I can say about their content. This chapter needs only her design. A psychiatrist re-read her own city's deaths under her own criteria, and the city's statistics moved: the same deaths, the same city, a different count, because the decider's approach had replaced the default. That is the negotiated ledger in its smallest possible demonstration, one city counted twice, with the count moving when the reader changed. The re-review is the sociol-

ogy's experiment, run once, in Edinburgh, in the same year the Monroe County authors printed their opening sentence. The two demonstrations are the year's pair: a certifier saying the statistics tell about their producers, and a psychiatrist showing it.

The operational answer to the negotiated ledger has its own document, and the document is read at the page. In November 1988, in the Journal of Forensic Sciences, volume 33, pages 1445 to 1456, Rosenberg and his colleagues published the Operational Criteria for the Determination of Suicide. The working group represented coroners, medical examiners, statisticians, and public-health agencies. Its abstract says why the criteria were needed. Certification decisions vary from state to state and county to county, and without explicit criteria certifiers may be more susceptible to pressures from families or communities not to certify a death as suicide, and the degree of underreporting is unknown. The vary, the susceptible, and the unknown are the design's three confessions in its own abstract. The abstract is the profession diagnosing its own ledger, printed in 1988, an echo of the trooper's decade. The sentence about variation is the design's confession in the profession's own journal. The confession is the working group's reason for existing, and the criteria are the answer the profession wrote for itself. The pressures sentence is at page 1446, verified at the page, and it is one of this book's three epigraphs, the confession. The criteria's two elements are the third chapter's: self-infliction and intent, with explicit or implicit evidence, and no written note required in every case. The list on the page is the design's answer to its own variation, and the answer's date is 1988, eight years after the trooper left the road.

The guides that followed the criteria are on the record at their pages. The National Association of Medical Examiners' A

Guide for Manner of Death Classification, 2002, read at pages 5 and 8. Classifications rest on evidence, uncertainty is real, a classification can be amended, and accident or undetermined is the proper finding when suicide would be speculation. The guide is the profession's rulebook, and its answer to the family in the room is the threshold: speculation is not certification. The threshold is the mercy's limit, stated by the profession itself.

The CDC's Self-Directed Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements, 2011, read at pages 21 and 23. Suicide is death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior. Undetermined self-directed violence is distinguished by unclear suicidal intent on the available evidence. The definition and the distinction are the federal system's answer to the count's problem, and the answer's two boxes, the suicide and the undetermined, are the honest pair the whole book keeps its eye on. The undetermined code has its own geography: who gets filed there varies by place and practice, and Sorenson, Shen, and Kraus's 1997 study of California is cited by its record and never characterized, because I did not read it. The honest box's literature exists, and its existence is the evidence that the box's use is a practice, and practices vary.

The ledger's negotiation has a history of its own, and the history is the chapter's spine read backward. The count was made before it was measured, and measured before it was audited, and audited before it was reformed, and the reform's document is the 1988 criteria. The criteria's sentence about pressure is the negotiation's confession, printed by the negotiators themselves. Its date is 1988, eight years after he left the road, and it never reached the counties where the question lived. The trooper's county attorney never read it that this book can show,

and the county's practice never changed because of it that the record holds. The negotiation's history is the reason the count's shape is the shape it has, which is the book's argument about the count's making. The argument's limit is the book's honesty: the negotiation produced the count, and the count's shape is measured, and the mercy's part in the negotiation is unmeasured. The unmeasured is the verdict's hole, and the hole is the answer to the book's second question, and the second question is the one the type-level literature was never built to answer.

The certifier-type literature is read here as three questions kept apart, because evidence for the first is not evidence for the third. First, whether institutions produce different counts. Pescosolido and Mendelsohn, 1986, the founding measurement-error study, in the American Sociological Review, volume 51, pages 80 to 101, its abstract now read. The study found systematic misreporting in American suicide statistics, and it found that the misreporting had little discernible effect on the relationships commonly used to test sociological explanations of suicide. Both halves print, because the book's honesty runs in both directions: the records are distorted, and the distortion did not erase the patterns the sociology was built on. The direction is the abstract's own, and the article's tables remain unread here, so the direction stays at the abstract's width and no further. Klugman, Condran, and Wray, 2013, at the abstract's width, the abstract verified. Elected coroners certify slightly fewer suicides than medical examiners and appointed coroners, and the appointed investigators underreport less than the elected coroners, who are subject to greater public pressure. The pressure's name is the study's. The study's mechanism is the elected official's answer to the neighbors: the seventh chapter's mechanism, measured at the county's scale. Fernandez and Jayawardhana, 2024, in Health Services Research,

at the abstract's width, the direction stated and the percentages held. Coroners-only states underreported suicides and performed fewer autopsies than states with a medical examiner in the chain, and required coroner training did not affect the determinations significantly. The training's null result is the design's null: the design's output did not move when the training was required, which is the kind of evidence the book prints when the evidence runs against its own hope. The direction is the book's type-level finding, and the type is the system Nebraska runs, and the system's kind is the fourth chapter's machine measured against the other kinds. Neeleman and Wessely, 1997, on coroners' backgrounds in England and Wales, is cited by its record and never characterized. Nebraska is a coroners-only state with elected certifiers and a 2009 training law, and the type-level measurement's direction runs against its kind.

Second, which practices explain the differences. Capacity, in the autopsy: the office that can open the body can answer the question. Pressure, on the elected official: the decider who answers to the neighbors is the decider the type-level studies measure. Professional thresholds, in Timmermans's 2005 finding at page 311 that relatives' concerns have a marginal influence on suicide determinations, and his Postmortem, 2006, the ethnography of a medical examiner's office, the nearest existing book to this movement. Its argument, carried at the record's width, is that professional thresholds protect the examiner's authority at the cost of the count. That is the mechanism's professional form. The examiner's authority is the threshold, the threshold is the count's gatekeeper, and the gatekeeper's discretion is the count's shape, which is what the type-level studies measure. The three mechanisms are the literature's explanations, and none of them is mercy, and mercy is the seventh chapter's qualitative finding, and the two are kept apart on purpose. Third, whether

family protection is one such practice. None of the type-level studies can show it, and the book holds the question open, because a difference between institutions is never a motive, and the motives' evidence is the seventh chapter's, and the seventh chapter's is qualitative. The open question is the book's honesty: the type-level effect is measured, the mechanism's motives are not, and the two are kept apart on the page the way they are kept apart in the argument.

The undercount reviews close the chapter's account. They are cited at their records and characterized at the level I can stand behind, which is the level of what they are and what they found, and never beyond. O'Carroll, 1989, on the undercount's existence. Sainsbury and Jenkins, 1982, the counter-position that the errors are random and cancel, carried from the ninth chapter. Jarvis, 1991, on medical examiners and manner of death. Tøllefsen, Hem, and Ekeberg's 2012 systematic review of the reliability of suicide statistics, in BMC Psychiatry, the heterogeneous reliability studies' own gathering, the literature's answer to the question of how far the counts can be trusted. Bakst and colleagues, 2016, on the accuracy of suicide statistics. And Rockett's work on misclassification from 2010 forward, including the 2018 surveillance analysis of suicide notes and psychiatric history in the violent-death system. The analysis is the evidence that the certificates' own contents drive the verdicts, and the verdicts' contents drive the count. The count's evidence is what the system runs on, which is the book's chain of custody for the count's making, and the chain's every link is a decision, and the decisions are the count's real content. And Phillips and Ruth's 1993 detector deserves its own sentence: mortality peaks at symbolic ages, a signature of suicide, were found in the causes of death suspected of hiding suicides and in pedestrian deaths, and absent from the controls. The detector is the literature's

proof that the undercount leaves a statistical fingerprint even when no one is ever reclassified. The fingerprint is the kind of evidence this book's arithmetic chapter can never run on Nebraska, because the Nebraska count's cells are too small to read it in. That is its own finding about the count's size, and the finding's size is the arithmetic chapter's problem. The problem is the reason the exercise is a sensitivity exercise and never an estimate, and the estimate's absence is the book's discipline. The discipline is the answer to the reader who would want the number: the number does not exist, and the absence is the count's confession. The confession is the book's answer to its own question, printed where the number would stand. That standing is the fourteenth chapter's exercise: the what-if, with the ledger's silence printed beside it.

The Nebraska of it comes next, because the type case is the book's ground. Nebraska is a coroners-only state with elected certifiers, an autopsy rate near the floor, a training law from 2009, and no medical examiner anywhere in it. The type-level literature's direction runs against that kind of system, and the kind is what Nebraska is. The measurement of the kind is the closest the record comes to an answer about the state, and the answer's direction is the undercount's direction. The motive behind it is the one thing the measurement cannot see, and the measurement's blindness to motive is the reason the seventh chapter's qualitative evidence had to exist. The qualitative evidence is the mechanism's voice, and the voice is England's and New York's and Missouri's, and never Nebraska's. That never-Nebraska is the book's hole, printed as a hole, never filled with the neighbors' answer. The fourth chapter's machine and the type-level measurement are the same fact read at two scales, and the two scales' agreement is the chapter's evidence. The evidence's limit is named on the page. The mercy is not in the

measurement, and the mercy is the book's second question, and the second question stays open. That openness is the verdict's shape.

The objection is this chapter's to answer first: constructionism proves too much. If the count is made, then everything is made, and the book's argument dissolves. So the book keeps its claim at the point of certification and goes no wider. The suicide rate is produced, and the production has measurable effects, and the effects run in a direction. The direction is the measured finding of the type-level literature, and the literature never names a motive. The motive's absence from the measurement is the reason the measurement can be trusted, because a measurement that carried its own motive would be no measurement at all. The measurement's honesty is the kind this book can use, and the motive's evidence is the seventh chapter's, and the two kinds of evidence are the two columns the verdict is returned from. The narrower claim is the only one the evidence carries, and the narrowness is the book's answer to the reader who would want the wider one, which is the answer the whole book is built to keep honest. The wider claim would be the constructionist's own, and the book refuses it, because the book's case is that a real thing was mismeasured. A real thing's mismeasurement is the only claim the evidence supports, and the support is the type-level measurement and the seventh chapter's mechanism and nothing wider. The nothing-wider is the book's discipline, the refusal to let the sociology's strength borrow the motive's voice. The refusal is the reason the book's verdict can be trusted as far as it goes, which is the only way the verdict can be trusted at all. The verdict's honesty is its limit, and it is the book's answer to the reader who has watched the whole negotiation: the verdict will fit inside the evidence. The evidence's edges are on the page, and the edges are the verdict's limits, and the limits are the

book's promise to the reader, kept where the reader can check. The difference between institutions is never a motive. Mercy is a motive. Mercy is unproven here. The book's discipline is to keep those three sentences from ever merging.

The movement's measurement is this. The kind of institution Nebraska has certifies fewer suicides than the other kinds by a measured margin, in the type-level studies, for reasons the literature names: capacity, pressure, professional thresholds. Mercy is not among the reasons it can name. The measurement is the book's answer to its first question at the level of system type, and the second question, the motive, is the deliberation's. The two questions are now on the page apart, which is the reason this movement exists. The movement's yield is the answer to the trooper's whisper at the width the record allows: the kind of system he worked under is the kind that undercounts. The undercount's reasons are named, and the mercy is not among them. The mercy's absence from the measurement is the answer's limit, and the limit stays with the deliberation. The whisper's second half, the proportion, is unmeasured still. The measurement says nothing about the motive, and that silence is the book's honesty, and it is where the deliberation stands. What the measurement cannot see, the exercise can still bound, and the bounding is the fourteenth chapter's method, run on the ledger this movement has now described at its own width. The trooper's state is the type case of the kind, and the kind's direction is measured, and the motive is the deliberation's unanswered question, and the arithmetic chapter's exercise is the only honest way left to ask it. The ledger was negotiated, and the negotiation has a literature, and the literature's names are on the page. The 1988 list is where the chapter rests, because the list is the confession that the negotiation was always known.

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Chapter Thirteen

Usually Fails

The government's own table is the chapter's first witness. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Traffic Safety Facts for 2024, the alcohol-impaired driving edition, is the current federal ledger of drink on the road. It runs fourteen pages, with tables by role, by age, by sex, by vehicle type, by time of day, by state, and its source line names the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, the second chapter's census, grown old. It opens this chapter because the countercase against the trooper begins here, in the government's own numbers, at the page. The trooper's claim was about what a lone night crash usually is. The table says what fatal crashes usually involve. The two statements are not the same statement, and the distance between them is this chapter's ground. The chapter's work is to give the countercase its full federal weight, every figure at the page, before the book's claim is allowed to stand near it.

The table is a living document, and its movement is on the page. Its first figure runs the decade: 10,280 deaths in alcohol-impaired-driving crashes in 2015, rising to 13,599 in 2021, then falling three straight years to 11,904 in 2024. The 2024 edition is built on the 2024 Annual Report File, the preliminary file, with the finals behind it through 2023. The book notes the file status because the book's discipline is file status: a table is a file with a date, and the date is part of the figure.

What the table says, at the page, is this. In 2024 there were 11,904 deaths in crashes in which at least one driver was alcohol-impaired, and that was 30 percent of the year's traffic fatalities. The threshold is printed. Impairment means a driver at or above

0.08 grams per deciliter, the legal line in every state but Utah, which the sheet notes set its line at 0.05 in late 2018. The sheet's accounting caution is printed under its figures: the agency estimates blood-alcohol concentrations when test results are unknown. A share of the table's numerator is modeled, which is the book's theme inside the government's own footnote. Even the federal count of the chemistry is partly made, and the making is disclosed, and the disclosure is what a ledger is supposed to do.

The sheet's interpretive caution is printed on its first page, in the agency's own words. This book carries the sentence whole because the whole concession lives in it. Use of the term, the agency says, does not indicate that a crash or a fatality was caused by alcohol impairment. It indicates only that an alcohol-impaired driver was involved in the crash. Involvement is membership in the crash. Causation is a further claim, and the agency declines it, on the page, in the footnote voice of its own table. The distinction is the chapter's first lesson: the federal ledger counts presence, and presence is not cause, and the trooper's question is about cause. Every figure this chapter prints is a presence figure. The cause figures do not exist, because nobody's form asks the question that would produce them.

The table's geography of the night is the countercase's center. Among drivers in fatal crashes in 2024, the share alcohol-impaired was 31 percent at night against 10 percent by day. The sheet defines its own hours: night is 6 p.m. to 5:59 a.m., day is 6 a.m. to 5:59 p.m. By crash shape, the share among drivers in single-vehicle fatal crashes was 32 percent, against 14 percent in multivehicle crashes. By week, 28 percent of drivers in weekend fatal crashes were impaired, against 15 percent on weekdays. The trooper's crash was the single-vehicle night crash. The federal table cannot speak for that crash's driver directly,

because it measures the night and the shape separately. At night the impaired share runs near one in three, and in single-vehicle crashes it runs near one in three. No joint cell is given. The reader should not multiply them either; the joint share is unmeasured, and the book says so. The composition caution belongs on the page beside the figures. These are shares of the drivers already in fatal crashes, a description of a population that already crashed, and never a per-mile risk for the driver setting out. The mile is not in the table. The denominators are crashes and drivers in crashes, and the book keeps the denominators on the page, because the discipline of this chapter is which denominator a figure owns.

The table's people have their own columnar shape, and the shape belongs on the page. Among drivers in fatal crashes in 2024, the impaired share peaked at 28 percent in the 21-to-24 age group. It ran 22 percent among men and 16 percent among women, and there were four impaired men in the file for every impaired woman. By vehicle, motorcycle riders and passenger-car drivers carried the highest shares, a quarter each, and the large-truck drivers carried 4 percent. The sheet also carries the drivers' own pasts: the alcohol-impaired drivers in fatal crashes were three times as likely as the sober ones to carry a prior conviction for driving while impaired, 6 percent against 2. The table's typical impaired driver is a young man in a car in the dark, three times as likely as the sober one to carry the conviction. That shape will matter when the suicide studies' own columns arrive, because the columns rhyme.

The table's interior is worth one more paragraph, because it sharpens what the countercase can and cannot say. Of the 11,904 deaths in these crashes, 7,247, or 61 percent, were the impaired drivers themselves. And the impairment was rarely marginal. In 68 percent of the 11,904 deaths, at least one driver in the crash

measured 0.15 or higher, nearly twice the legal line. The most frequently recorded concentration among drinking drivers in fatal crashes was 0.15 itself. The federal chemistry is mostly heavy chemistry. A driver a little over the line is in the table too, but the table's center of gravity is far past the line. The countercase's typical author is not the man with one beer. It is the man with a long evening, and the long evening leaves its own track in the driving before it leaves one in the blood.

There is a row under the line too, and it matters to the era's old figure. The sheet's own public page counts 2,028 people killed in 2024 in crashes where a driver measured between 0.01 and 0.07, below the legal line but not sober. Presence under the line is the era's net, the any-measurable net, still visible in the current ledger's margins. And the sheet's state table carries Nebraska's own row: 251 road deaths in 2024, of which 75, or 30 percent, came in crashes with an impaired driver, and 57 in crashes where a driver measured 0.15 or more. Nebraska sits at the national share. The state's own row in the current federal table says the chemistry is as common on its roads as on the country's. The trooper's roads were these roads, forty years earlier, with a wider net and fewer restraints.

The countercase assembles itself from that table alone. A lone driver dies on a Nebraska highway in the middle of the night, and the scene shows no skid marks, and the car is at full cruise against the bridge end. The trooper read that scene as intent. The federal table reads the same scene's hour and shape and answers, at each separately: near one in three, chemistry. The table cannot read the one scene, and the trooper could not read the population, and the two failures are the same failure stated at two scales. The third chapter said it from the road's side: a drunk driver often does not brake either, and impairment's track is the erratic track until it is no track at all. The

suspicion and the chemistry leave the same wreck.

The article this book is built on carried the era's own figure, and the figure prints as the article's, with its own definition, labeled for what it is. The article said 57.3 percent of traffic deaths in 1982 were alcohol-related, and the definition of the time was any measurable alcohol in a driver, pedestrian, or bicyclist involved in the crash. That net is wider than the current table's 0.08 line, and the two figures are unlike, and the book never compares them. The 57.3 is the era's share under the era's net. The 30 percent is the current share under the current line. The distance between them is a change of definition, of measurement, and of the roads themselves, all three at once, and no honest column can be drawn from one to the other. The 57.3 is labeled unverified at the original table, because I never saw the 1982 federal table it came from. It prints as the article's figure, and the article's figure is what the trooper's era believed about its own roads.

The wide net had its own effect on the era's readers, and the effect is worth stating, because the trooper's usually was formed under it. When nearly three deaths in five carry some measurable alcohol, the chemistry stops explaining any one of them. A trooper working the ditches in those years saw the bottle or smelled it at scene after scene. I am inferring now, and the book says so, because this is the one formation the record cannot show me. The scenes that stayed with him were the ones the bottle could not explain. The sober driver, the settled morning, the car aimed at the only fixed object on an empty mile: those kept. The book cannot say how many of those he saw, because he kept no count and the scenes are gone. It can say the era's background made the unexplained scenes stand out, and the standing-out is how a suspicion forms, and a suspicion formed that way is a memory's count, which is the one count

this book cannot audit.

The vocabulary moved with the definitions, and the movement is its own small ledger lesson. The era's word was alcohol-related, and the word covered presence at any measurable level. The current word is alcohol-impaired, and the word covers presence at or above the legal line. Same chemistry, two nets, two counts. The book's second chapter said the count was always the definition's and never the dead's. The alcohol row is the same lesson in a neighboring column: what the era counted as drink's share, the present would not count, and what the present counts, the era would have counted wider. The numbers are honest. The nets differ. The comparison is the error the book refuses to print.

One sentence about the calendar, said once and never repeated. The conversation was in the fall of 1983, so the 1983 state report is that year's ledger, still being compiled while he talked, and the 1982 edition was the latest he could have read. Whatever the trooper knew from documents, he knew from the 1982 book and earlier. The 1983 deaths on the roads he knew were still warm, not yet rows. The distinction matters because his usually was built from scenes and not from tables, and this chapter is the chapter where the tables answer back.

The third chapter's hinge belongs here again, stated at its own width. The 1974 act required the testing of dead drivers for alcohol and drugs, on a four-hour clock, with results tabulated monthly and identity sealed. No standing order anywhere tested the dead driver for intent. The era built a machine to find the chemistry and never built one to find the purpose. So the chemistry is what the record holds, and the record's shape favors the countercase. Drink is visible in the era's ledger because the era looked for it. Intent is invisible in the era's ledger because the era never looked for it. The countercase's strength

is partly manufactured by the ledger's design, and the book says so, because the honesty runs in both directions. The same ledger that cannot prove the trooper cannot acquit him either, and the cannot is the word the chapter stands on.

Fatigue is the countercase's second author, and its measurement is newer than the trooper's era. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's 2018 study, read at its page, put cameras in the cars of more than 3,500 drivers for months. It scored drowsiness by the share of time the driver's eyes were closed in the minutes before a crash. Drowsiness was present in 8.8 to 9.5 percent of the crashes studied, depending on the window used. It was present in 10.6 to 10.8 percent of crashes severe enough to be police-reportable, against the federal estimate of the time of 1 to 2 percent of police-reported crashes. The study's limit is printed with its figures: the sample held few severe-injury crashes and no fatal crash. Its percentages describe crashes, and never deaths. The referral is to the third chapter's criteria. A sleeping driver and a set-eyes driver can leave the same unbraked track, no roadside test for drowsiness exists, and the driver who survives looks alert afterward and may never have known he was gone.

The follow-up work moved the estimate into the fatal file, and it prints at its own page. The AAA Foundation's later brief, on fatal crashes from 2017 through 2021, estimated 17.6 percent of them involved a drowsy driver, some 29,834 deaths across the five years. The estimate is a model's, built from the crash's own circumstances, and the brief says so. It is printed here as the current federal-adjacent answer to the question the trooper's scene asks: how often is the steady wheel a sleeping wheel. The answer, in the fatal file's terms, is about one fatal crash in six. That is the honest weight of it, and the chapter carries the weight without flinching, because the weight is the measure of what the

book's claim must outvote. The 2018 study's discussion carries the earlier estimates it was measured against, and one of them belongs here: the Tefft estimate the 2018 study's discussion carries, published in 2012, put a drowsy driver in 16.5 percent of fatal crashes. The number has been high, by every method that has looked, for as long as anyone has looked with cameras or models. The official row said 1 to 2 percent, because the official row counts only what an officer wrote, and an officer cannot write what he cannot test. The fatigue row is the book's argument wearing the countercase's clothes: a real thing, undercounted, because the scene cannot testify to it.

The trooper's scene had three possible authors, and two of them stand in this chapter with the government's numbers behind them. The third is the one the book is about. The third chapter named them from the road's side, the drunk, the sleeper, and the man with his eyes set, and this chapter has now priced the first two. Even the body position is ambiguous at the federal table's width. Of the impaired passenger-vehicle drivers killed in 2024 whose restraint use was known, 64 percent were unbelted. The belt's absence is the erratic author's common mark and the set author's quiet one. The point is not that the third author never wrote. The point is that the first two wrote often, in the same hand, on the same roads, in the same hours. Any reading of any one wreck must outvote them both. The countercase is not a debunking. It is the prior. It is what the scene means before anyone asks harder questions. In his counties no one asked harder questions, because the asking machinery was never built there.

The scene does have signs that lift it out of the table's usually. The chapter gives them room, because they are the third chapter's criteria stated as the countercase's limit. The head-on aimed at the heavy truck is the Nordic finding's shape, and the

table's chemistry does not explain an aimed driver. The note found later, the history, the settled affairs: the sorting information lives in the follow-up, and the follow-up is what never ran. Absence of skid marks is the scene's silence, and the silence has three authors. The aimed wheel has one. The criteria exist to read the difference. They were read in Edinburgh and Stockholm and the Australian coroners' own records, and they were never read in the counties along the Platte, and that difference in reading is the whole gap the book is built on.

Alcohol returns one more time, from the other side of the ledger, and the return is kept at the width the record supports. Rockett's 2018 surveillance analysis of the violent-death reporting system carried the certificates' own contents, and among them the toxicology of the certified suicides. Drink is a companion of suicides, present at the scene of some share of them. This book prints no percentage, because the analysis as I can stand behind it supports the companion and never a number. The companion cuts both ways, and the chapter lets it. A drunk lone crash can be grief wearing chemistry. A certified suicide can carry a blood alcohol that would have read as the whole explanation had the death come in on the road instead of a bedroom. The chemistry is evidence of state and never of story, and the story is what the coroner was asked for.

The countercase's own literature carries the same finding from inside the suicide studies, and this book owes it its own paragraph. The Maryland group had been at the question for years. Schmidt, Perlin, Townes, Fisher, and Shaffer's 1972 comparison of drivers in single-car crashes ran in the Archives of General Psychiatry. It is cited here at its record, its finding left at the width I have read. The 1977 series is the one read at its abstract. Schmidt and his colleagues' 1977 Maryland series, the low end of the band in the seventh chapter's account, followed

182 fatally injured drivers and 96 nonfatally injured drivers over six years. It judged 1.7 percent of the fatal crashes suicides and 1 percent of the nonfatal crashes attempts. And it compared the judged with the other drivers, and its abstract says what they shared: neither group was unusually high in prior suicidal ideation, and both groups were socially deviant, with poor driving records and high alcohol abuse. The suicide drivers and the accident drivers looked alike, in the suicide study's columns. The likeness is the countercase's strongest internal evidence. Even where a series was built to find the suicides, the found and the unfound had the same records and the same drink. The sorting the series performed ran on information beyond the scene, the histories the study gathered. The histories are exactly what a county attorney at a midnight scene does not have. The scene says the same thing in both columns. The columns diverge only in the follow-up, and the follow-up is what the trooper's counties never ran.

So the same wreck tells two stories, and the two stories deserve their own naming, because the book has run on them both. Suspicion's story: the trooper carried a count he could not prove, and the count was built from scenes like this one, and the scenes' frequency taught him a proportion the ledger never recorded. Mercy is the county's story: the county attorney who signed the certificate read the same scene and spared the family, and the sparing was easy because the scene genuinely would not say what it was. The sparing had a documented form, and the seventh chapter carries it, printed at second hand and labeled as such. The practice rule the review quotes from the examiner's office runs: the reasonable certainty signed as suicide, the highly probable signed as suicide with the family's consent, or as undetermined without it. The two stories meet at that sentence. Suspicion says the scene hid a suicide. Mercy says the certificate

spared a family. The sentence from the examiner's county says both can be the same act. Both stories are told about the same unbraked car. Both are consistent with everything the federal table contains. And the table, the chemistry mandate, the fatigue cameras, and the suicide studies all agree on the one thing the trooper never conceded. The ordinary reading of the lone night crash is the ordinary reading, and it is usually right.

The armor goes on the page before the critic writes it, and it is the chapter's: this concession undercuts the book. If the lone night crash is usually drink or fatigue, then the trooper's usually is backwards, and the book's founding claim spends itself against the government's table. The answer is the book's architecture, stated here because this is where it bears the load. The trooper's claim was the stronger one, and the book has carried it from its first page: usually, he said. The concession prices what that word costs him, and it does not touch the kind of his claim. Some such deaths exist, they were filed as accidents, the filing was predictable, and the count of them was zero by construction. The concession concedes the proportion and cannot touch the construction. The countries that looked found the deaths. The examiner's county said the count described its producers. The five-grade table moved when the asking changed. None of that depends on the trooper's proportion, and all of it survives the federal table, because the federal table measures chemistry and the book's question is intent, and intent is the thing no table in this chapter measures. And the concession has a floor, and the floor is the band's own low country. Suppose the countercase is exactly as strong as the government's table makes it. The suicide studies still found their one and two and three percent, in Maryland and Scotland and Queensland, under the same chemistry's shadow. The table's usually is real, and the band's low countries are real, and both fit inside the same wreck's possibil-

ity. The trooper's usually is the one the record cannot return. The band's usually never claimed to exist.

The scope statement returns here with its three parts, because this is the chapter where all three earn their wording. The phenomenon exists: the countries, the series, the detectors, and the confession in the profession's own abstract establish it. The remembered proportion cannot be tested: the trooper's denominator is gone, the scenes were never re-examined, and the ledger's cells for his category are suppressed or zero in the years anyone can check. Nothing presented here establishes that suicide predominated in his caseload, and the book says so in the chapter built from the strongest evidence against him. The three parts are the book's settlement with the countercase, and the settlement is the reason the book can be trusted where it does make claims.

What the chapter settles is this. The record corroborates the trooper in kind: the deaths exist, the filing pattern exists, the count's construction exists, and the mercy's machinery existed to run it. The record cannot measure him in proportion, because his denominator is gone and the confounders leave his exact track, the dark hour, the empty road, the steady wheel, the unmarked brakes. In kind, corroborated. In proportion, unmeasurable. The two verdicts are the chapter's yield, and they are the reason the arithmetic chapter must run as a sensitivity exercise and never as an estimate. The fourteenth chapter will take the band's low countries and hold them, as what-ifs, against the one Nebraska year whose figures the author owns. The countercase sets the exercise's honesty: the band is a what-if because the table in this chapter is the usually, and the usually is drink and sleep, and the intent author writes rarely. Rarely is the honest word. The trooper's word was usually, and usually is the word the record cannot return.

The chapter closes on the word it is named for. Usually is the trooper's own word, the word inside the sentence he said to me, the word this book has been testing since the first chapter quoted it. Usually is a proportion word, and proportions are the one thing the record refuses him and refuses the book. The federal table has its largest share, and it is chemistry's, and one in three is not a majority. The trooper had his usually, and it was the road's. The table's share and his usually cannot be reconciled, because they were counted in different ledgers, and one of the ledgers was never kept. The kept ledger says chemistry, about one time in three, in the crash's own hour and shape. The unkept one said intent, in a voice in an interview, in the years just after the scenes. The chapter's honesty is that both are printed here, the table's usually and his, and the reader is never told which to believe about any one wreck, because the record does not know. The word survives him, and the word survives the table, and the word is the honest shape of everything this chapter could not settle. The concession is printed at full strength, in the government's own numbers, in the chapter named for it. Usually, unmeasured, his.

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Chapter Fourteen

The Arithmetic

Before the chapter computes anything, it writes down what a figure has to carry to enter. The specification is the chapter's license to compute, and it comes first for the same reason a search warrant comes before the search. Before any number is multiplied, every figure that enters this chapter carries nine fields on the page: the population, the geography, the period, the road-user category, the numerator, the denominator, the inclusion rules, the classification method, and the uncertainty status. A figure without its nine fields does not enter. The fields are not decoration. The population fixes the scale, because a count of four means one thing in a county and another in a nation. The geography fixes whose dead are being counted, because the road ledger and the vital ledger do not draw the same map. The period fixes the era, because codes and definitions move. The road-user category separates the driver from the pedestrian from the passenger, because the question is about drivers. The numerator and the denominator are the figure's two halves, and a share without its denominator is a rumor. The inclusion rules say who got counted, the classification method says who decided, and the uncertainty status says how far the figure can be carried. The specification is the chapter's first document because the whole book has been building to this chapter's temptation, and the temptation is to multiply carelessly. The trooper's whisper was a proportion, and proportions are made of numerators and denominators, and this chapter writes down both, every time, or it does not write.

The disclaimer is declared before the exercise, and it governs the calculation and its display from the first line to the last. What follows is a sensitivity exercise, a set of what-ifs, and never an estimate. It answers the question "how many" only in the conditional: if a measured share from somewhere else held on Nebraska's roads in 1982, the count would have been this. It never answers how many there were. There is no point estimate in this chapter, and no interval, because an interval would pretend the scenarios agree about something they do not. The display follows the same rule. Every what-if prints with its if attached, the share, the base, and the source in one sentence, so no reader can carry the answer home without its condition. The what-ifs are shown separately, each in its own column, and the certified count is never subtracted from any of them. Those are the terms. The terms are the difference between an exercise and a claim, and the chapter holds to them because the claim it serves is too easy to oversell.

The inputs are stated with their sources, and the first source is a booklet I own. I have it on the desk as I write this: a state booklet from 1982, the cover faded, the binding stapled, the tables printed in the flat ink of a state print shop. It cost a dollar or two when it was new, and it counted the dead of the year I spent driving those roads back and forth to college, and I have carried it through four moves and four decades. Everything this chapter multiplies starts on its pages. The 1982 edition of Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts, from the author's own copy, gives the year its four figures. Two hundred sixty-one persons were killed, in 226 fatal crashes. Eighty-four of the year's fatal crashes began with a lone vehicle, the state's own nearest column to the trooper's category. And thirty of the state's ninety-three counties recorded no road deaths at all. The booklet is an annual the state printed for its own planners, and its tables count what the era thought

countable: deaths, crashes, injuries, drink, restraint, hour and day. Intent has no table in it, which is the fourth chapter's machine seen from the data side. The fourth figure is the quiet one, and it earns its place here. A third of the state's counties had a zero year on the road. The trooper's county-level usually was formed in places where the annual count was one or none, and where one death read twice was the whole year's column. The smallness is not a footnote to the arithmetic. It is the arithmetic's condition.

The conversation year's own figures were thinner until the archive answered, and the recovery is stated with its date. The Department of Transportation's historical fatality table, a later compilation verified at its page, gives 255 persons for 1983, located by the crash and never by residence. The 1983 edition of the state booklet then surfaced in the state's online documents archive, dated June 1, 1984, and read at the page in October 2026. It carries 221 fatal crashes, 72 of them opening with a lone vehicle into a fixed object or an overturn, and 22 of the 93 counties recording no road death. What it still does not carry is a count of driver deaths, and the first permitted column's empty cell stands on that. So the exercise runs on 1982, the year whose booklet I own, with the conversation year's own edition set beside it, and the two sit side by side without being merged.

The same table gives the era its shape, and the shape is worth one paragraph, because the trooper's years sat inside it. The state's road-death column ran 292 persons in 1960, climbed through the decade to 489 in 1971, then fell through his working years: 376 in 1975, 330 in 1979, 261 in 1982, 255 in 1983, and 237 by 1985. The fall was the country's own, the belts and the speed limit and the changing fleet. The series is printed here so the era's scale is honest. The whole state's road dead, in the year he talked about, would not fill one page of a county weekly.

The category this book is about is a fraction of that page, and the fraction's size is what the exercise illustrates.

The geography is settled before anything is computed, because the two ledgers count different geographies and the book keeps them apart. The road count locates a death by the crash: where the wreck happened. The vital-statistics count locates it by residence: where the dead person lived. A Nebraska road death can be a Kansas resident, and a Nebraska resident can die on a Colorado road, and the two counts will never quite agree. The disagreement is a property of the geography and never an error. The code rows this chapter prints from the vital ledger are residence rows: a Nebraska resident's crash suicide enters Nebraska's row wherever the car hit. The road ledger's rows are occurrence rows. The trooper's scenes were occurrence events on his roads, and the vital ledger's Nebraska cells are his state's residents, and the overlap is large and imperfect and never assumed. This chapter prints which geography each figure owns and never lays one over the other. The overlay is the error the whole exercise is built to avoid.

The band comes next. It prints as the 2024 review's second table gives it, verified at the review's page, each study in its own row with its own denominator, and nothing portable across rows. Schmidt and his colleagues, Maryland, 1977: 1.7 percent of the total fatal crashes, in a series of 182 fatally injured drivers followed over six years, the low country, where the sorting ran on histories gathered afterward. Kuroda and Pounder, eastern Scotland: 1.9 percent of driver deaths and 1.5 percent of all road deaths, a conservative re-reading in Ovenstone's own country. The Queensland series: 2.9 percent of driver deaths certified, 4.7 percent with the possibles included, the coroner's own two tiers kept separate, with six of its fourteen possible cases left open or undetermined, the study's middle box. The Nordic figures

are shown in the tenth chapter and are not transferred here, because the Nordic road is a different road, with lorries in the night and head-on shapes, and the transfer rule is the chapter's spine. The band has no floor. The lowest row is a place where the asking was conservative, and the band's rows are studies, and studies are not floors.

That sentence is the article's one wrong sentence about the record, and the correction is made on the page. The article this book is built on said that careful reviews settle on a floor of about two percent. The phrase has no source I could stand behind. The survey once assigned to it, Murray and de Leo's 2007 Gold Coast community study, is a community study of people's own reports of ideation and method. It is a fine exhibit about the mercy economy from the planner's side, and it is no evidence of any floor in any road count, because it counted what people conceived and attempted, never what certifiers wrote. The candidate review that might have carried it remains unread at its text. So the floor sentence is corrected. The book's low country is the band's low rows, each with its own denominator. The band is what it is because careful re-readings found one or two or three percent where they looked, and never because a floor was proved. The correction is the chapter's honesty, printed where the error would have stood. It is the article's one wrong sentence about the record, and it is corrected here because the arithmetic is where the floor would have done its quiet work.

The columns are pre-registered, and the phrase means what it says. The permitted multiplications were fixed before the numbers were combined, and they are the only columns this chapter prints. Three are permitted. The band's shares across Nebraska's driver deaths. The band's shares across Nebraska's road deaths and fatal crashes. And the Australian share of all suicides across Nebraska's own suicides. The rule exists because

the book has already felt the pull it guards against: I once swore off the Nordic transfer and then made it in a single clause, and the clause had to be withdrawn. Pre-registration is the lock on that door. The columns were chosen for what the studies actually measured, and the state's figures were then brought to them, and no column was added after the figures arrived. Everything else is forbidden, and one forbidden multiplication deserves naming: the 84 lone-vehicle first events. That figure is the trooper's category's nearest official neighbor, and the exercise never multiplies it. None of the band's shares owns that denominator. A first event is a crash's first moment, the studies counted deaths and fatal crashes, and adding a column for the 84 would be building the answer the chapter wants. The 84 prints as context, with the reason it is never multiplied printed beside it. Eighty-four fatal crashes began with a lone vehicle in Nebraska in 1982; that is all the column says, and it is the figure the trooper's whisper was made of, and it is not the exercise's to spend.

The first permitted column cannot run, and its failure is the ledger's exhibit. The band's driver-death shares, Scotland's 1.9 and Queensland's 2.9 and 4.7, need Nebraska's count of driver deaths in 1982, and that count was never recovered. The state's booklet counts persons and crashes, and the vital ledger counts residents by cause, and neither column is a count of drivers. So the column prints its shares and its empty cell, and the empty cell is marked unavailable, which is one of the ledger's four states, met here before the ledger itself is even opened. The arithmetic's first lesson is that the state did not count the category the question needs.

The second column runs, twice, as two what-ifs, and its two bases are kept honest first. The 226 are fatal crashes and the 261 are dead persons, and the gap between them is the year's multi-

death crashes, and the two bases are never mixed. If Maryland's 1.7 percent of fatal crashes held on Nebraska's 226 fatal crashes in 1982, the count would be about four. If eastern Scotland's 1.5 percent of all road deaths held on Nebraska's 261 road deaths, the count would be about four. Two what-ifs, two different shares from two different systems with two different denominators, landing in the same single digits. The agreement is shown, and it is never averaged, and the two scenarios are never joined into a range, because they measure different things and their agreement is a curiosity and never a confirmation. About four, says the second column, if. The if carries the column.

The third column runs on the vital ledger's count. Nebraska recorded 164 suicides in 1982, residents, by the federal compressed file, under the codes for suicide and self-inflicted injury, and 147 in 1983. The same ledger prints the state's population that year, 1,583,033, and the crude rate it yields, 10.4 per 100,000, and all three figures are the ledger's, residence geography, all ages, both sexes, no exclusions. The Australian study found road-crash suicides running about 1.5 percent of all suicides, 640 against 41,890, on a lone-crash road system shaped like Nebraska's own. If that share held among Nebraska's 164, the count would be between two and three. Labeled a what-if, like the others. The Finnish share is not transferred, and the correction is admitted on the page. I once ruled the Nordic transfer out and then quietly made it anyway, and the book withdraws it here. The Nordic road's head-on shape is not the Platte's shape, and the Finnish teams' looking is not the counties' looking, and a share is its road's and its askers' before it is anyone else's. The Australian share stands in its place because the Australian road, the long empty two-lane with its fixed objects, is the trooper's road's cousin.

The columns' agreement on single digits is itself the exhibit,

and its meaning is narrower than it looks. The exercise does not say Nebraska hid four deaths in 1982. It says the hiding place, on these what-ifs, is single digits wide. A mechanism running at the careful studies' own rates would move about four deaths in a year when thirty of the state's ninety-three counties recorded no road deaths at all. Four deaths spread across ninety-three counties, a third of them at zero that year. No year-by-year reading of any public file could ever catch a count that size. The what-ifs measure the size of the space the book's question lives in. They do not put anyone in it.

The exercise's caution is carried from the tenth chapter and kept on the page. Driver suicides run near one percent of all suicides where anyone has counted them. The claim this book makes is therefore about the mechanism and never about the total suicide rate, which this mechanism cannot move far. The Finnish series behind the caution judged 84 driver suicides in five years among 1,419 driver deaths, in a country recording well over a thousand suicides of all kinds a year. Its authors said the mechanism barely stirs the rate. Nebraska's 164 make the same point in American scale: the what-ifs' single digits against a hundred and sixty-four. The arithmetic agrees. Every what-if in the chapter lands in single digits, in a state that recorded 164 certified suicides that year. The stakes were never the rate's movement. The stakes are the count's construction: whether the mechanism ran, whether anyone looked, and what the ledger says was found.

The ledger follows, and its four states are named first, because the point of printing it is that it does not speak in one voice. A cell can be zero, a count that exists and says none. A cell can be suppressed, a count that exists and is withheld because it is small. A cell can be unavailable, a figure never recovered by anyone. And a cell can be noncomparable, a figure

the classification of its day could not have produced. The four states are four different sentences about the world. A zero says the counting ran and found none. A suppression says the counting found few and the file will not say how few. An unavailable says the asking was never done or the answer was never kept. A noncomparable says the question could not have been asked in that era's language. The chapter keeps them apart because the book's case depends on knowing which silence is which, and because the trooper's era, it turns out, holds all four.

The noncomparable state is checked at the ledger itself. The federal compressed mortality file for 1968 through 1978, the era's own coding scheme, was queried for its suicide causes, and the list it returns has no crash entry. The scheme's suicide codes run from poisonings through firearms to a residual line, other and unspecified means, which counted 404 deaths nationally in 1975. That residual line is the only place a crash suicide of those years could have gone: unnamed, uncountable, folded in with everything unspecified. So for the first years of the trooper's career, the question "what did Nebraska record" is not unanswered. It is unanswerable in principle, because the code that could have carried the answer did not exist. The noncomparable cell is the ledger's deepest silence: the silence of a category not yet invented.

The zero state is the era's own row. From 1979 the code existed: E958.5, suicide and self-inflicted injury by crashing of motor vehicle, and the compressed file prints Nebraska's row by year, by residence. In 1981 it prints 1. In 1988 it prints 1. In 1990, 1992, and 1996 the cells are suppressed, small counts withheld. Every other year from 1979 through 1998 prints 0, and 1983, the conversation year, prints 0. The whole twenty-year row sums to a suppressed total, somewhere between five and nine. That is what the state wrote down, in the vital ledger, in the trooper's

category, across his era and the two decades around it: one, one, three small withheld counts, and fifteen zeros.

The nation's row runs beside it, because a zero means one thing against a silent nation and another against a counting one. The country recorded 46 such deaths in 1979 and 133 in 1998, 49 in the conversation year itself, 1,487 across the twenty years. The nation's row rose while Nebraska's row printed its zeros and its withheld handful. Nebraska holds about two-thirds of one percent of the country's people. An even share of the nation's 1983 cell would have been a third of one death, which is the arithmetic's own way of saying the cell cannot be read. The zero is a real zero, a counted zero, a zero with a code and a column and a population behind it. What it cannot be is a proof, because the fourth chapter's machine is the thing that filled the box, and the machine's literature says its kind undercounts, and the count it produced is the thing the book is about.

The suppressed state is the modern row's texture. From 1999 the codes split into the honest pair, X82 for the intentional crash and Y32 for the crash of undetermined intent, and Nebraska's by-year cells are mostly withheld as too small. X82 prints sixteen suppressed cells across 1999 to 2020, summing to 30 for the whole span, and zeros in six years. Y32 prints five suppressed cells, its span total withheld, between five and nine. The federal file's rule suppresses sub-national counts under ten to protect the dead's families, a mercy built into the ledger itself. The book marks the mercy's cost without resenting it. Nebraska's annual crash-suicide count cannot be read year by year in the public file. The unreadability is not an oversight. It is policy, and its consequence for this book is that the state's modern row can be bounded and never read.

The ledger's latest years print the same texture. In the federal file now current, the single-race file that runs 2018 through

2024, the nation's X82 row holds between 157 and 190 a year, 1,200 across the seven years. Nebraska's cells for 2020, 2021, and 2022 are suppressed, and 2023 and 2024 print zero. The Y32 row beside it prints one suppressed Nebraska cell in the seven years, and at the national level one withheld year, 2023, beside a 2024 cell that prints 10. The overlap years between the old file and the new, 2018 through 2020, match exactly, and the match is printed because the two files count race differently and the book's discipline extends to the ledger's join. The modern ledger's answer about Nebraska is the same answer in newer ink: bounded, withheld, unreadable year by year.

The unavailable state has two entries, and they differ. Nebraska's driver deaths for the conversation year are unprinted in every ledger the search reached, and the recovered 1983 edition does not carry them either; the first permitted column's cell stays empty. The second chapter's unseen era form is the same state's kin. The paperwork that might have held a suspicion is unrecovered. The unrecovered is printed as unrecovered, never filled with a neighbor's answer. The national Y32 cell for 2016 returned no row in either of two federal files, and the totals were withheld for suppression constraints. That reads as a small withheld count and never as a zero, and the book prints it as that. Unavailable is the honest word for both: the figure exists or existed somewhere, and I do not hold it.

What the ledger establishes is what was recorded, and never what should have been. The what-ifs say that if the careful rereadings' shares held on Nebraska's 1982 roads, the year would have held about four such deaths, or two or three, by the suicide-count route. The ledger says the state recorded zero in the conversation year, one in 1981, one in 1988, and withheld small counts three other times in twenty years. The two statements are both on the page now, and the chapter's discipline is that

they are never laid over each other. The what-if is not a finding. The zero is not an acquittal. The gap between them is the book's question, priced at last in single digits. The question cannot be answered at the cell level, because the cells that would answer it are the suppressed ones, and the unrecovered ones, and the ones from before the code existed.

The certified count is never subtracted from a scenario, and the rule deserves its reason on the page. Subtraction would say: the what-if predicts four, the ledger holds zero, therefore four were missed. That sentence is the estimate the chapter refuses to print. The what-ifs are transfers from other systems with other roads and other coroners. The ledger's zero is a record of what a coroners-only state with no looking machinery wrote down. The difference between them is not a count of anything. It is a demonstration that the counting and the count were made by different hands, which is the twelfth chapter's finding, arrived at here by arithmetic.

The trooper's usually has now been priced from both directions. The thirteenth chapter priced the countercase: the lone night crash is usually chemistry or sleep, one time in three by the federal table, and the suspicion usually fails. This chapter prices the claim: if the studies' low countries held in his state in his era, his county's share of the year's arithmetic was a fraction of one death, and his roads' whole share was single digits. His usually was a memory's count of the scenes the bottle could not explain, and the arithmetic cannot return it, because the state's own arithmetic for his category is a zero and a withheld handful. What the arithmetic can do is what it has done: show the scale at which the question lives, and show that the scale is small enough to hide in, and show that the hiding was built.

The reader can see what each assumption implies, and can see what the state wrote down. And the reader has been shown

why the two must never be laid over each other. The implies is three single-digit what-ifs, each with its if attached. The wrote-down is a zero, a pair of ones, three withheld cells, and a code that did not exist for the era's first years. The implies and the wrote-down are the chapter's two columns, and they stand apart by design, and the space between them is exactly as wide as the difference between a sensitivity exercise and a count. The book's question lives in that space. The verdict will live there too.

The chapter closes where the exercise ends, with the era's own number set beside the scenarios and never subtracted from them. The scenarios say about four, if. The ledger says the state recorded, in the conversation year, in the code the era had just been given, zero. The zero is printed, and the four is printed, and the reader has been told what each one is and what each one is not. The whisper said usually. The arithmetic says the usually cannot be returned. The ledger says nothing was written. The whisper and the what-if and the zero are the movement's three witnesses on the question of how many, and they cannot all be true at once, and the record holds all three. The three sentences are the book's settlement with the question of how many. They are left standing beside each other, unreconciled, because the record cannot reconcile them. Pretending otherwise is the one arithmetic this book refuses to do.

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Chapter Fifteen

Both Certainties Die at the Scene

The article this book is built on gives this chapter its opening fact: the car is towed and crushed, and the evidence goes with it. A lone crash on a Nebraska two-lane ends. Within days the wreck is cubed in a crusher behind the salvage yard. The scene's physics, the speed, the wheel angle, the pedal, the brake's silence, are compressed into a block of scrap the size of a television. The report is filed, the certificate is signed, the dead are buried or the family is billed, and the one mind that knew what the last mile was is gone with the car. The tow is the era's own funeral for the evidence. The county's routine had no step in it that preserved a scene for a question no form asked: no photographs held for a second reading, no measurements kept against a future doubt, no reason to keep the car. The crusher was not negligence. It was the routine working as the routine was built, and the routine was built for the certainty the certificate would carry. That is the condition the question lives under, and this chapter is the one that says so without moving: the single midnight is unrecoverable, and everything the book can honestly claim lives on the far side of that sentence.

What is unrecoverable is specified here, once, at full width. Where no note speaks, no history speaks, no survivor speaks, and no recorder speaks, the intent of one dead driver in one wreck is gone beyond any honest recovery. The lone crash of the trooper's years was that case by construction. The note was the era's exception. The history lived with the family, and the family was not asked. The survivor did not exist, by the category's own definition. The recorder, the car's own witness, is the sev-

enteenth chapter's subject, and it did not exist in his years: the mandate for it is younger than some of the book's readers. The sixth chapter's method existed the whole time, and its absence from the trooper's counties is part of the unrecoverable. The psychological autopsy was twenty years old by his last decade, the Los Angeles center's own instrument, and the article named what his counties had instead: no psychological autopsy tradition and no reconstruction budget. The method to ask the question existed in the journals. The budget to ask it did not exist in the counties. The asking's absence is not a defense of any one certificate. It is the reason the certificates are unreviewable now, each one a door closed by a routine that never opened it. So the single case is closed, and the book closes it on the record: anyone claiming certainty about one particular midnight, in either direction, is guessing. The trooper's certainty is a guess. The certificate's certainty is a guess. The difference between the two guesses is that one of them was typed onto a form and became the count, and the other was carried for a whole career and became a book four decades on.

What is recoverable is specified beside it, and the pair is the chapter's spine. The pattern is recoverable: occurrence, that these deaths happen; and system effect, that the kind of institution deciding them moves the count. Prevalence is not recoverable, and prevalence was the trooper's own claim, his usually. The thirteenth chapter priced the usually and the fourteenth bounded it, and the single case stays shut, and the pattern stands open. Both certainties die at the scene. The coroner's certainty that the crash was an accident dies there, because the scene cannot carry it. The trooper's certainty that the crash was a suicide dies there, because the scene cannot carry that either. The two certainties met once, in the fall of 1983, the man with the typed form and the man with the memory, and this book has run on

the friction between them since its first page. What survives the scene is the system around the scene, and the system is the book's subject, and the system's two errors are this chapter's weighing. The chapter's promise is that the weighing will be fair to both men, because the trooper's error and the coroner's error are both on the page. The book has named the trooper's at length: his usually was a memory's count, and the thirteenth chapter showed it failing against the federal table.

His other error is named here, at the weighing's door, because the article carried it and the book owns it. He was certain about scenes: this one, that one, the ones the bottle could not explain. The certainty was earned the way a trooper earns things, by standing in the ditch, and it was wrong the way scene-certainty is always wrong, because the scene's silence has three authors and the ditch cannot tell them apart. The article's own sentence is the book's frame for him: anyone claiming certainty about one particular midnight, in either direction, is guessing. He guessed. So did every certificate. The chapter does not weigh his guess against the certificate's guess; it weighs the two errors the two guesses became, one typed into a form, one carried home for twenty years.

The two errors need their names before their costs. Mercy's error mislabels a suicide as an accident. Suspicion's error mislabels an accident as a suicide. The article said this in one balanced pair of sentences, and the article's balance is the thing this book must break, because the two errors are not symmetrical, and treating them as symmetrical is the one elegance the book refuses. They differ in whom they harm, in how long the harm persists, in whether it repeats, and in whether the ledger notices. The chapter weighs them as costs, and it declares at the start that neither is harmless. The mercies of the county were real and the count's corruption is real. A weighing that begins

by denying one side's weight is not a weighing.

Suspicion's error first, because its cost has a face. A certifier who reads an accident as a suicide sends the word home to a family, and the eleventh chapter's exhibits are the price list of what the word cost in the era. The insurance clause first. The policies of the era refused payment for a suicide within their first two years, and the 1885 provision the eleventh chapter closed on said it in its own words, which are printed in the Tables. Ritter's court in 1898 held that a sane suicide voided the policy even without the clause. The widow inside the clause window, the new policy, the two years not yet run, learns the verdict's price at the claims desk. Ritter's reason had its own double edge, and the eleventh chapter named it: the court feared that a promise to pay would tempt a man to die for his dependents. The fear and the mercy are the same fact read from two sides. The clause exists because the temptation was believed real, and the clause's window is exactly where a suspicion error is most expensive, and the clause's protection is exactly what the disguise was built to keep. The planner who chose the road, in the studies the eleventh chapter carried at pattern level, believed the verdict controlled the money. The belief is the mercy economy's supply side, and the claims desk is where the economy's errors are settled. That is what suspicion's error buys when it is wrong, and the eleventh chapter priced it, and the price is why the county reached for the accident box, and the reaching is not mocked here.

The burial and the stigma complete the price list. The church's old rules are the eleventh chapter's history: the crossroads and the forfeiture first, the juries' workaround after, and the 1983 Code's canon printed at the Vatican's own text, the modern mercy codified. A certifier who writes suicide writes toward that history, toward the family asking the parish what

the word means for the grave. The stigma is the price without a statute: the small town's knowledge, the son who grows up under the word, the widow's neighbors deciding how to speak of it. The error's cost is a family's whole standing, and in towns the size of the county seats this book counted, the standing is the family's capital. And the suspicion's own machinery made the error heavier in Nebraska. The fourth chapter's machine joins the two offices in one man. The certifier who suspects is also the prosecutor who would have to act on the suspicion. A suspected suicide in the trooper's counties was never a quiet opinion; it was the county's law officer reaching a conclusion about a neighbor, with the neighbors watching. The pressure to be sure before speaking belonged to the joined office, and the pressure pushed toward the kind box, and the push is the machine's bias, stated from the cost side.

And suspicion's error persists, and it repeats, and the repetition is structural. A county where one certifier decides for years is a county where one man's suspicion can mark a family a decade at a time. The harm is not contained in the one file. It renews with every anniversary, every insurance renewal the widow signs knowing what the policy would have said, every school census form the son fills out. And it repeats across the county's calendar, because the certifier who misreads once misreads with the same eyes for twenty years. Persistence and repeat error belong in suspicion's column, and the column is heavier for them.

The man inside the machine deserves his paragraph, because the machine's error was made by a person at a specific hour. The county attorney of the trooper's era was woken by the same telephone the trooper answered. He drove to the same scene or read the same report at breakfast, and the family was known to him, because in the counties of the census figures this book printed,

everyone was known to him. His decision had to be made with the family waiting, with the funeral director waiting, with the insurer's window running, with no laboratory of intent available to him at any price. The book has indicted his office and acquitted him for thirteen chapters, and the weighing explains why both: the office put one man in that hour with that box, and the man is what the hour had.

Mercy's error now, and its cost has no face, which is exactly its cost. A certifier who reads a suicide as an accident sends nothing home to anyone. The family is spared, the policy pays, the church buries, the town prints the kind word. The cost leaves the county entirely and arrives at the systems that count.

The death by despair disappears from the suicide ledger, and the book keeps the two disappearances apart. An ascertained suicide leaves the road ledger by the standard's own exit door; a mislabeled one stays in it, counted as an accident, corrupting the road count from inside. The first is an omission from one ledger; the second is a lie inside another, and the two do different damage. The suicide ledger is read by the people who fund prevention, and the road ledger is read by the people who place barriers and evaluate them. The corrupted count corrupts the counting's uses. The road-safety planner ranks its roads by their death columns, and a road whose deaths are misread is a road misranked. The barrier money follows the ranking. The barrier itself stops the drifted car whatever the driver's reason for drifting; the programs aimed at despair, and the evaluations that read the count to see what worked, are aimed by the ledger, and the ledger is misaimed.

The error repeats there too, and the repetition is the systems' own kind. Every undercounted year becomes the next year's baseline, the misinformed map is drawn from the misinformed count, and the barrier's evaluation runs against deaths

the ledger never showed. Persistence and repeat error live in both columns. The difference is where the repetition lands: suspicion's repeats in one family's dinners, and mercy's repeats in every plan the count informs. The suicide ledger's readers are the prevention systems. The article's own sentence is owned here, because the evidence now carries it: a county that never records its despair never counts it, and a state that cannot count a problem cannot fund its answer. The article set the modern scale beside the era. Nebraska today records roughly 280 to 300 suicides a year, printed as the article's figures at the windows the state's publications give. The road figure is verified at the agency's historical table: 227 people killed on its roads in 2023. The state's despair is larger than its road toll. The state funds against the road toll's visibility and the despair's count alike. Every death filed wrong moves both ledgers' readers a little further from the truth they are spending money against. The book claims the corruption at exactly this width and no wider: the cost accrues in what the count cannot inform. The chapter claims nothing about a death that would otherwise have been prevented, because that chain cannot be shown on this record, and the claim-strength rules exist to keep the sentence from growing teeth it has not earned.

The second party sits in the cost columns too, and the book has owed him a paragraph since the tenth chapter. On the Nordic road the driver suicide dies head-on against a heavy truck, and the truck has a driver, and that driver survives, and his household lives under the record of the death for the rest of its life. The tenth chapter reported that the professional drivers there perceive these collisions as an occupational risk, and the perception is a cost line of its own: a mercy that misfiles the death also misfiles the surviving driver's night. His household reads the certificate too. What the record says the death was,

the surviving family of the other vehicle lives beside, and the mislabeling's harm in the head-on country lands on a stranger's kitchen table. The trooper's empty-road shape spared the second party, and the tenth chapter's shape did not, and the difference belongs in the weighing, because the error's cost depends on the road's geometry. The lorry driver's household is the record's dependent: the certificate says accident, or the certificate says suicide, or the certificate says nothing settled, and each wording lands on a man who was driving the other vehicle and lived. The honest box serves him too, when it is honest. The settled lie serves no one on either vehicle. The book keeps him in the columns because the road's deaths are never only the dead driver's own, and a weighing that counts only the first family has miscounted the crash.

One expected exhibit is absent, and the absence is printed. I had hoped to carry a set of contested insurance cases in this chapter's cost column, the litigated fights where a family's money turned on the manner box, and the research did not return them. None print. The cost columns stand on the exhibits the book has: the statute and the cases the eleventh chapter read at their pages, the practice rules, the systems that count. The unreturned research is named here because the book's rule is that a hole prints as a hole, and a cost column with a hole in it is still a cost column, only narrower.

The article ran on the balanced pair, mercy's error and suspicion's error set equal in parallel clauses, both happen, only one compounds. The book states the asymmetry once, at the depth the evidence earned. Suspicion's error harms a family by name, in a town, for years, and the harm is visible, and the visibility is what deters it. Mercy's error harms no one by name. Its cost lands on systems, and the systems cannot testify, and the namelessness is why the mercy was so easy to reach for. Both

errors are real. Only one of them ever sent a bill to an identifiable address. That is the asymmetry, and it is demonstrated everywhere else in this book and stated only here, because an epigram repeated becomes a slogan, and the book's claim is too serious to rhyme twice.

The Queensland finding belongs to the asymmetry, and it is set here as its modern evidence. In the study of 761 driver deaths, the coroners left six of the fourteen possible cases open or undetermined, and the leaving-open was not failure. It was the honest box in use at the cases' own edges, the certifiers declining to settle what the evidence would not settle. The asymmetry statement and the Queensland six say the same thing from opposite sides of the ledger's century. The errors are weighed by their costs, and the cost of honestly not knowing is the smallest cost on the page, when it is honest.

Which brings the chapter to the box itself, weighed in the open, as the two things it is. First, undetermined as an expression of uncertainty: the box that says what the evidence says. The medical examiners' guide of 2002, read at pages 5 and 8, is the profession's own standard for the threshold. Classifications rest on evidence. Uncertainty is real and can be recorded. A classification can be amended when new evidence arrives. And accident, or undetermined, is the proper finding when suicide would be speculation. The guide's threshold is the profession drawing the mercy's own boundary: when the evidence will not carry suicide, the certifier's choices are accident where the evidence supports it, and undetermined where it does not, and speculation is certified nowhere. The box used that way is the count's honesty. It keeps the count from claiming what it does not know.

Second, undetermined as an accommodation: the box used to hide a conclusion the certifier has reached. The examiner's

own county carried the practice rule, printed at second hand and labeled: the reasonable certainty signed as suicide, the highly probable signed as suicide with the family's consent, or as undetermined without it. That is the box as the family's mercy, the remedy's name worn by the mechanism. The two uses look identical in the ledger and are opposites in the office, and the book tells them apart because the verdict depends on the difference. One use says the evidence is thin. The other says the evidence was read and then overruled by kindness. The ledger cannot distinguish them, which is the twelfth chapter's negotiated count again, one box deeper.

The profession's own two voices are on the record now, and the chapter sets them side by side because the record allows it. The English coroners of Atkinson's account ran on commonsense theories of what a suicide looked like, and the look included what the family could bear. The American examiner's office of Timmermans's ethnography ran on professional thresholds, and at page 311 the finding is that relatives' concerns have a marginal influence on suicide determinations. The two voices are not two men. They are two arrangements: one where the decider answers to the neighbors, and one where the decider answers to the profession, and the twelfth chapter measured what the arrangements do to the count. Two systems, two answers to the family in the room. The voice that spares and the voice that files are both on the record, and neither is the book's villain. The distance between them is the distance the county attorney of the fourth chapter worked in. No ethnography of his own office was ever written, and the county's answer to the family in the room is the era's own unwritten row.

The surveillance fact is carried here with its branch, because the branch decides what the honest box can reach. A death coded undetermined enters the violent-death reporting system

by design. An accident-coded road death enters only if another record, the police report or the coroner's file, calls it suicide, and the system assigns its own manner from the three sources it reads. The branch is this: the suicide mislabeled accident on the road is invisible to the one federal system built to see such deaths, unless some other document in the file names it. The honest box feeds the surveillance system. The kind box starves it. And the starved system then reports a country with fewer of these deaths than it has, and the report is cited as the count, and the count is the fourteenth chapter's ledger with its suppressed cells. The box's two uses have two different downstreams, and the downstreams are why the weighing matters at all. A surveillance system fed by the honest box can at least count the uncertainty, and the count of uncertainty is the count's confession, printed in a column anyone can read. A surveillance system starved by the kind box reports certainty instead, and the reported certainty is the sixteenth chapter's subject: the printed story that made uncertainty look settled.

Sweden's finding prints here as the authors' own inference, kept at its label. When the five-grade table moved in 2012, the suicide share rose and the rise came, in the authors' own words, almost entirely from the undetermined grade, and the authors inferred that twelve of the twenty undetermined cases were suicides. The inference is theirs, printed as theirs, because the table gives category totals and never one death's path. What the table proves is the grades' movement. What the authors infer is the deaths' identities. The book keeps the two apart, because the difference between a moved cell and a moved death is the difference between the count and the counted. Even where the honest box emptied into the count, the emptying is a judgment, and the caveat the seventh chapter stated holds here: a reclassification is a judgment and never a ground truth.

Now the objection. The critic's easiest sentence about this chapter is that undetermined is also a cop-out, and the sentence is sometimes true, and the chapter says when. The box is a cop-out when the evidence has been gathered and the certifier declines to read it. When the note exists, the history is known, the scene was worked, and the file says undetermined because the office found the settled word cheaper than the true one, the box is hiding. The box is honest when the evidence has run out: when the scene is a crushed car and a dead driver and no note and no history gathered, and the certifier says the county does not know. The difference is not the word on the form. The difference is whether anyone looked. Sweden's honest box is fed by a team that goes to the scene. The trooper's counties' honest box went unchecked, on the evidence this record holds: no one was sent to ask, and the fourth chapter's machine had no one whose job was asking. An unused honest box is not honesty. It is the accommodation's other door: the accident box doing the work, with the honest box left as decoration.

The weighing that earns the verdict is stated here, and the verdict sentence itself is the eighteenth chapter's and is not spoken here. The returns are in, and the book says what they were. The type-level studies held: the kind of system Nebraska runs certifies fewer suicides than the other kinds, by a measured margin. The ledger was run, and it read low and silent: zeros across the era's row, the conversation year's own cell a counted zero, and the modern cells suppressed past reading. The neighbors were run, the first window corrected and rerun, and the weighing is printed whole, because the book's own tree stands on it. Nebraska's certified suicide rate is the lowest of the six, and its undetermined box stands unswollen beside them. That is the whole of what favors the type-level prediction in the table.

The table's own order will not carry the prediction. Iowa's

medical-examiner chain stands second-lowest. South Dakota's county coroners stand highest. Oklahoma's centralized medical examiners stand beside them at the top. Within the six, the type of system does not predict the rate, and the table says so in its own rows. And the table cannot say why. Firearms, rurality, and demographics sit on every one of these rates, and the Native American population shares of the Dakotas and Oklahoma sit on three of them, and the comparison carries no controls for any of it. A lower recorded rate can mean fewer deaths or fewer certified deaths, and this table cannot tell the two apart. The book committed to printing the result either way, and it prints here in the weighing: Nebraska stands lowest, the ordering within the six does not follow system type, and the confounders are named and uncontrolled. The neighbors can neither confirm nor deny the type effect in Nebraska's own numbers, and the book says so in the weighing. The middle clause's wording moved on the extraction, as the book said it would. The three wordings were written before the numbers, and the numbers chose among them, and the choosing is printed so the reader can audit the book against its own tree. What the weighing cannot move is the motive. Whether mercy was Nebraska's motive stays undetermined, by the book's standard. The one documented merciful practice routes to the honest box, and Nebraska's honest box went unused, and the motive's evidence is qualitative, and other counties', and never his. The weighing is complete. The verdict is earned and not yet delivered.

One line belongs to the book's kin, and it belongs here. The deaths this chapter weighs are the deaths that leave no words, so the state writes the last one. The author's No One Dies Lying is named once, here, where the writing of the last word is the subject. The certifier's word is the last word. The chapter has weighed what it costs to write it wrong in either direction.

What the weighing settles is this. The reader can now tell an honest uncertainty from a settled one. The honest one says the evidence ran out. The settled one wears the mask of the accident or the mask of the box itself, and the difference is whether anyone looked. The reader knows what each error costs and to whom. Suspicion's error bills a family by name. Mercy's error bills the systems that count. The second party's household pays where the roads put a second vehicle in the shape. And the reader knows why the honest box is a remedy only when it is telling the truth. Used as accommodation, it is the mechanism in the remedy's clothing. Used as uncertainty, it is the count's conscience. The ledger cannot tell the two apart, and the book can, and the difference is the looking. The trooper's counties never looked, so far as this record can see: no one was sent to ask, and the machine had no one whose job was asking. The book's verdict rests on that sentence. The remedy existed, and it was never used, because the using required the looking, and the looking was never built. That is the movement's yield, and the movement ends holding it.

The chapter closes as it was built to close, with the two errors set side by side as two columns of cost. In one column: a widow at a claims desk inside the clause window, a burial argued over, a son under the word, a family marked for years by a certifier's suspicion. In the other column: a count that does not know its own dead, a planner's map misranked, a surveillance system starved, a state's despair filed under luck, and no single name to attach to any of it. Both columns are real. Neither is harmless. The fourteenth chapter's zero sits in the ledger's column, and the widow of the clause window sits in the other, and the zero and the widow are the same era's two prices, one invisible, one itemized. They are not equal. The inequality lies in their shape and never in their size: one harm walks into a kitchen, and the

other walks into a ledger, and the kitchen can fight back and the ledger cannot. The trooper's counties chose the ledger's harm, and they chose it kindly, every time the question was avoidable and the default won, and the kindness is the fourteenth chapter's zero and the sixteenth chapter's settled-looking page. The two columns stand here at the movement's end, and the verdict that follows them is the eighteenth chapter's to speak.

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Movement IV. The Verdict

Chapter Sixteen

The Myth Is the Paperwork

The Platte from a truss bridge is a river that will not hold a single channel. The bridge is the era's own, riveted steel on the two-lane, the kind of bridge the trooper's scenes ended against. The view from its walkway is the view the county got of its own deaths: from above, from a structure built for crossing, never for looking. It braids: the water splits around a sandbar, rejoins, splits again, and from the bridge deck the whole river looks like a page of crossed-out sentences, each channel true for a mile and abandoned by the next. A braided river is all channels and no main stem, and the only way to say where the river is, is to say where the water is now. Nebraska's river is the book's figure for a state's stories. The channels run side by side, each one current while it lasts, none of them the river. The trooper's belief ran in one channel, the courthouse's certainties in another, the county weekly's sentences in a third, and the channels never met, and the state was the whole braid. This chapter is about one channel of print, the thinnest and most official of them. The county weekly's crash sentence is its subject: what the sentence did to the deaths it described, and what a legend is when the paper prints a certainty nobody had. The question sounds like a departure from the inquest, and it is the inquest's public phase. The verdicts this movement weighs were read out in the weeklies for forty years, in the three-word voice, and the jury of the towns never knew it was hearing them.

The definition comes first, from the folklorists, because the book's word for the formula is a technical one and the discipline owns it. Jan Harold Brunvand's The Vanishing Hitchhiker, 1981,

is cited to the book here as the standard introduction to the urban legend. I read in it the shape the word legend properly carries: a story told as true, believed by its tellers, attached to no stable source, fitted to the place where it is told. The legend's markers are the friend's friend who swears it happened, the local details welded to a traveling plot, the moral folded inside the shock. The definition matters because this chapter's claim is narrow and the narrowness needs the technical word. The trooper's belief, spread among troopers and funeral men and ambulance crews, would be occupational folklore if it were shared and told. The county weekly's formula is something else, and the chapter will name it last, after the scholarship has had its say. The book's honesty about the word begins here: the chapter is titled for a myth, and the myth is not the trooper's, and the chapter spends its length proving which story belongs to whom. The assignment matters, because the easy version of this book would make the trooper the myth's hero, the keeper of the true story against the official one, and the record will not carry that version. His belief is testimony. The formula is the myth. The book's word lands on the print, not the man.

The occupational-legend scholarship exists, and it covers the trades that work beside death: the ambulance crews' stories, the funeral directors' stories, the nurses' and the police officers'. The trades that touch the dead all keep a body of stories, and the stories do the trades' own work, teaching the new ones what the forms will not say. I looked for a study of trooper or highway-patrol lore, the belief community the trooper would have belonged to. The sentence prints as the return records it. No study of trooper or highway-patrol lore was found, in two search strings run in the fall of 2026. The search was not systematic, so the absence is a search result and never a proof that the lore was never studied. What the record holds is one man's

belief, stated once, in an interview, three years after his road years ended. The book has called it that from the first chapter, and this chapter is where the naming is argued.

A shared lore would have done two things for the book. It would have made the belief a community's knowledge, tested in the retelling, smoothed by the trades' own skepticism. And it would have made the county weeklies' silence a community's answer, the print face of a story the trades already knew. Without the community, the belief stands as testimony, one witness's account of what he saw and what he concluded. The book's rules treat testimony as exactly that: heard, weighed, never multiplied into a chorus it was never shown to be.

The interviews that could have established the sharing were not held, and the book says so. The weaker sentence stands in its place: the belief is one man's word, as far as this record runs. One man's word is not nothing. It is testimony, and testimony is what an inquest is built from. It is not a legend, and the difference is the folklorists' own: a legend is a community's story, and a community was never found. The chapter's argument survives the weakening, because the chapter is not about the belief. It is about the print. The belief needed no community to be wrong in print, and the formula needed no legend to do its settling.

The formula is the chapter's center, and it is quoted with its status printed on it. Driver lost control. I read the sentence in the county weeklies of those years, in the two inches beside the courthouse news, under the harvest estimates, above the church suppers. I was a boy reading those papers at a kitchen table, and I read that sentence more Thursdays than I can count, and I never once asked it a question. I quote it as my reading of those papers, without paper or date, because no audited corpus of the era's weeklies was assembled, and the book does not pretend one was. The sentence's ancestry is dropped. Where the

formula came from, what wire service or house style or editor's habit carried it, is not claimed, because the research did not establish it. What is claimed is what the author saw it do, week after week, in the towns the deaths belonged to, and the seeing is a reader's seeing, labeled as one. The weekly was the town's ledger of record. Its crash sentence was the last official sentence most of those deaths ever got, and the sentence was three words long.

The weekly's economy belongs on the page, because the formula had a supply chain. The county weeklies ran on the courthouse column and the school board and the harvest. The crash brief came from the county itself: the sheriff's office or the attorney's, a phone call or a form, the same office that had certified the death. The paper did not investigate its own county's wrecks, because the county was the paper's source for everything else, and a two-person newsroom does not interrogate the hand that fills its columns. The formula arrived at the paper already settled, from the office that settled it, and the paper's sin was stenography, which is the sin the county was built to produce. The print face of the count was the courthouse's voice, relayed.

The wider ecology of the sentence is described at the width the record allows. The era's weeklies filled their columns from the county and the wire, and the wire's own crash briefs ran in the same constructions. Whether the formula traveled the wire or grew in place is unknown, and the ancestry is dropped because the research did not establish it. What is on the record is the wire's own later unease, the 2016 entry, and the studies of what the constructions do. The sentence's origin is not claimed. Its work is.

What the sentence does is visible in its grammar, and the grammar is why the folklorists' definitions matter here. Three

words. The driver is the subject, the control is the object, and the losing is the whole event. The formula asserts nothing about intent and says nothing false about the wreck, and it makes a certainty out of a morning nobody could reconstruct. The crash happened to the car, in the sentence's construction, and the driver's relation to it is a misplacing, like keys. No one decided anything in the formula's world. There is no hour in it, no speed, no empty road, no unanswered question. The sentence is complete the way a ledger line is complete: it closes the account it opens. The trooper's claim was that someone had decided, and the formula's whole work was to make the deciding unreadable, and the two sentences are the same four inches of column read in opposite directions. Read as the county read it, the sentence says the night was an accident. Read as the trooper read his scenes, the same sentence says the night will never be asked. Both readings fit the three words. The three words choose the first one, by saying so little that the second has nowhere to stand.

The formula's perfection was that it was correction-proof. A reader in 1979 who believed the night had been misread had nothing to write to the editor about. The sentence asserted nothing about intent, so no contradiction could reach it. It said nothing false about the wreck, so no correction applied. The only answer to the formula was a question, and the formula's whole construction said the question had already been answered, and the paper's columns held no box for the answering's undoing. The town's ledger of record could record a death and close it in the same two inches, and the closing was the formula's tense.

The scholarship on what crash language does to a reader arrived in 2019. It is carried at its verified records, characterized at the level of what the studies were and what their abstracts

report. Ralph, Iacobucci, Thigpen, and Goddard's content analysis ran in Transportation Research Record, volume 2673, number 2, pages 663 to 671. It read two hundred local news articles about crashes and cataloged their grammatical patterns: the agent erased, the vehicle foregrounded, the crash framed as an event of physics. The formula's constructions were the study's categories, the county weekly's dialect written up in a journal.

The experiment that paired with it ran the other direction. Goddard, Ralph, Thigpen, and Iacobucci's study, in Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, volume 3, article 100073, showed 999 participants an article and varied its language. The language changed the blame the readers assigned and the remedies they preferred. The reader's judgment is the formula's product, and the experiment measured the production: move the agent, and the reader's verdict moves. The two studies are about pedestrian and cyclist deaths, and the book says so plainly. The transfer to the lone night crash is the book's, argued here and labeled as a transfer. The formula's grammar is not the studies' agentless construction; the formula names its agent. What it shares with the studied grammar is the erased intention: the driver is the subject, and the sentence still makes the crash something that happened to him. The studies measure what erasing intention does to a reader's judgment, and the county weekly's readers were the era's only jury most of these deaths ever faced.

The studies' own limits are kept on the page, because the book's discipline extends to its allies. They measured readers of pedestrian and cyclist articles in 2019, modern readers, modern papers, a different crash. The era's readers are gone, and no experiment can reach them, and the claim that the formula settled their reading of the lone night crash is an inference from the measured effect, labeled as one. The inference's strength is the

grammar's kinship: the constructions the studies measured and the formula share the erased intention, if not the erased agent. What the studies cannot say is what any one reader concluded in 1979. What they establish is that the construction does the settling, measurably, in the readers anyone can still test.

The Associated Press saw the neighboring construction from the newsroom's side, and its warning is the conditional one the second chapter carried at its own width. In 2016 the stylebook came to accept both accident and crash, and to warn that when negligence is claimed or proven, accident should be avoided, because the word can be read as exonerating. Claimed or proven: the warning governs the cases where someone can say what happened, and the trooper's cases were the other kind, where no one could. The formula sat outside the warning's reach entirely, because driver lost control claims no negligence and denies none. It exonerates by omission, which the stylebook's condition never touches. The warning's own career is the era's distance measured in a single entry: the profession needed until 2016 to caution against a word, and the caution reached only the cases with a claimant, and the trooper's cases never had one. The deaths this book is about were unreachable by the correction, because the correction was built for blame, and their sentences traded in no blame at all. The warning's arrival in 2016 is the date of the profession's own unease, decades after the trooper's era ended. The unease's limits are the chapter's point: even the corrected profession still had no entry for the sentence that settles by saying nothing.

The inversion is stated on its axis now, and it inherits the thirteenth chapter's discipline. The printed story erred toward zero. Every formula sentence made one kind of reading easy and the other kind unreadable. The easy reading was the accident. The count of the other reading in the county weeklies I

read was zero by construction, as far as a boy's reading reached. The public ledger of the era, the one the towns actually read, showed no such deaths at all, and it showed them weekly, in print, in a sentence built to end questions. The inversion's axis is this. The book's case is that a hidden count was larger than the printed one, and the printed one is the only one the era's public ever saw. So the myth ran in the opposite direction from every myth the folklorists catalog. The legends they study grow in the telling. This one shrank in the printing. The legend said the deaths existed. The formula said they did not, and the formula had the better distribution. The myth was no false story told by liars, and the book marks the distinction as the one the chapter stands on, because the claim collapses if anyone in the chain had to know. The myth was the paperwork's own voice in print, the certainty of the certificate exported to the two inches beside the courthouse news. The whisper was right in kind: there were deaths the formula could not read. On magnitude the book's conditional applies, the fourteenth chapter's what-ifs, single digits in a single year, printed there with their conditions attached. The true number is one the ledger may or may not have written down, and the sixteenth chapter does not reopen what the fourteenth bounded.

The five distinctions are owed here, because the chapter has spent the book's sharpest word and must now spend it precisely. A myth, in the folklorists' own sense and in the ordinary one, is a story that explains, believed by its tellers. A convention is a form everyone uses because everyone uses it. An incomplete description is a true sentence that leaves out the deciding part. An error is a sentence the writer would correct if shown. A falsification is a sentence the writer knew was wrong. The five are the chapter's manner box, the values its verdict can take. The chapter assigns the formula to its cell the way the book has asked every

decider to do: by the evidence of what the sentence is, and never by the convenience of the argument.

The county weekly's formula was a convention that produced incomplete descriptions, and the book claims it as exactly that. It was not a myth in the folklorists' sense, because no one told it as a story; it had no plot, only a tense. The title's word is the other sense, the book's own: a certainty widely believed and never examined. It was not an error, because no showing could have corrected it; the writer knew no more than the sentence said. It was not a falsification, and the book claims falsification for no one. Not the weekly's editor, who printed what the county gave him. Not the county, which certified what its evidence held. Not the era, which never built the machinery that could have told them more. The distinction is the chapter's honor. The formula did its harm without a single liar in the chain, which is a worse finding than a liar would be, because a liar can be caught. A convention cannot be caught. It can only be noticed, and the noticing is this chapter, sixteen chapters from the formula's first quoting.

The trooper would have read the same sentences, and his reading is the inversion's human form, supplied by the book and labeled as supplied. He stood in the ditches on the nights themselves, and then read the week's account of them in three words, and the distance between the ditch and the sentence was his whole education in what the count was. His private count, the scenes the bottle could not explain, had a public zero facing it every Thursday. The belief needed no community to survive that. It needed only the weekly's regularity, the settled sentence arriving on schedule, year after year, in the county where he had watched the scenes himself.

The harm's name is the settled look. The deaths the trooper counted were deaths that arrived in print already finished, the

reading settled before the reading began, and the settled look is what the formula was for. The scene could be ambiguous and the certificate could be thin and the family could be spared, and the sentence in the paper still read the same, because the sentence's work was never description. Its work was closure, and closure reads the same whether the file behind it ran to a page or to a line. A reader who met the sentence in 1979 met a closed account: the car, the ditch, the three words, the two inches, and then the harvest estimates. Nothing in the sentence invited a second question, and no second question was the era's public record of the death. The settled look is the paperwork's own product, manufactured at the courthouse and retailed by the weekly, and the myth of the book's title is exactly this: not a fable: a finish. The look of a question answered when the question was never asked. The fifteenth chapter's mercy column and suspicion column both end here, in print. The kindness signed at the courthouse became the certainty read at the kitchen table. The sentence that spared the family also told the town there was nothing more to know.

The formula was merciful too. That is the worst of it, and the book says it once: the myth was kind. The kind sentence and the kind certificate were the same kindness at two desks, and the town's whole understanding of its own dead ran through them both. The legend, if the belief was a legend, lived in the ditch and the funeral home. The formula lived in print, and print is where the era's public count was kept, and the count's public face read zero, week after week, in three-word sentences that said nothing false and asserted nothing about intent. The book's title claim for this chapter is stated at its width: the myth is the paperwork. It is not a legend around the paperwork, and not a lie inside it: it is the paperwork's own settled voice, repeated until the repetition looked like knowledge. The state's stories braided

like its river, and the formula was the channel with the courthouse's current in it. The current ran every week. The other channels, the trooper's belief and the family's knowing and the town's half-understanding, ran beside it and never joined it. The braid is the book's figure, and the figure pays off here: the myth was never the strange story whispered at the funeral home. It was the ordinary sentence printed at the courthouse's word, and its power was its plainness.

One line of kinship belongs in this chapter, in the formula's own family. The county weekly's crash sentence had a sibling in the injury brief, the formula that closed a story before anyone was asked. The author's No Injuries Have Been Reported is named once here, where the species of sentence is the subject. The official formulas, the ones that end the questions, are a family, and this book has been cross-examining one member of the family since its first page. The sibling's own work was the same work in a milder column, and it says the account is closed.

The objection is stated before the critic writes it. This chapter is cute and unscholarly, a folklorist's vocabulary laid over a courthouse's form, and the answer is the chapter's sourcing. The definitions come from the folklorists, cited to their books. The language findings come from two peer-reviewed studies, cited at their records, their transfer labeled. The formula is the author's own reading of his era's papers, labeled as that and never as a corpus. The inversion is claimed only where the evidence reaches: the print record made uncertainty look settled, and the count's public face was zero, and both are shown, and anything wider is the thirteenth chapter's concession wearing a press hat. The cuteness is the claim's shape, and the claim survived its own discipline. The chapter's weight rests on three words and their grammar. The grammar is checkable by any reader, the effect of the grammar is measured by the studies,

and the era's use of the grammar is the author's own labeled reading. Nothing in the chapter asks to be believed beyond what its sources carry. The formula's harm is the one harm in this book that can be demonstrated on a single sentence, because the sentence is the harm's whole instrument.

The reader knows what the formula did. It made a certainty out of unreconstructable mornings, in print, weekly, in the ledger of record the towns kept. The reader knows what it never did: it never asserted anything about intent, so no correction could ever be demanded of it, because nothing it said was false. And the reader knows why the settled look was the paperwork's export: the certificate decided, the weekly repeated, and the repetition was the only count the public ever saw. The fourteenth chapter's ledger counted the state. The weekly's three words were the state's count's face, and the face said zero, and it said it kindly, every Thursday, in two inches of print. The machinery of the fourth chapter had a print face, and the print face was three words long. The movement's work stands behind that sentence. The machine that decided. The mercy that priced the deciding. The sociology that measured the deciders' kind, the countercase that priced the trooper's usually, the arithmetic that bounded the count, the weighing that set the two errors in their columns. All of it is behind the three words now. The sentence was the sum of the system, printed weekly, and the system's whole output to the public was that sum. The formula is where all of it touched the public. The public's count was the weekly's sentence, and the sentence was the certificate's echo, and the echo is the myth the title names.

The chapter closes as the bookend to the first, on the formula quoted as the author's reading of it, with the movement's work now behind the quotation. Driver lost control. The first chapter quoted those three words as the era's voice, the sentence the

deaths arrived in. Fifteen chapters later the same three words stand at the verdict's door, and they read differently now: as the machine's accent, the certainty the system was built to print, the myth that was never a story at all. I read them in those years without seeing them. I have read them since with the whole book behind my eyes. They still assert nothing about intent. They still say nothing false. The weeklies themselves are mostly gone now, folded into shoppers and web pages. The era's sentences are crumbling in bound volumes no one opens. The formula outlives its papers, because the construction is still the language's own way of closing a crash. And they are the answer to the question the first chapter asked, about how a state can hide its own despair in plain print. One formula at a time, three words, no date, no paper, every week.

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Chapter Seventeen

The Car Now Testifies

The document is a rule's summary. It is dated December 18, 2024, in the Federal Register, volume 89, page 102810. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's final rule on event data recorders extends the pre-crash recording period for timed data metrics from five seconds at two samples a second to twenty seconds at ten. The summary is the document's own face, and the face says: the car's memory was made longer, by law, on a date. The rule responds to a mandate of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act. The document has the Federal Register's own anatomy: the summary, the dates, the docket number, the petition windows. A rule is the state's own ledger entry, dated and numbered, and this one is the book's last document, the newest page in a book full of old ones. The courthouse statute was 1915. The testing mandate was 1974. The criteria were 1988. The recorder rule is 2006 and 2024 and 2026, and the dates' own spread is the book's chronology compressed: the offices were built early, the questions were named late, and the witnesses arrived last. The count's modern machinery and the car's modern memory are on the same page now, and the page is dated, and the dating is the chapter's method. The machine that the trooper's era did not have is now regulated twice over. This chapter asks the only question the book has left to ask about the machinery of the scene. Now that the car remembers, does anyone ask it?

The memory is dated correctly, because the book dates everything. The standard's ancestry runs to August 2006, when the rule at 49 CFR Part 563 was established, at 71 Federal Regis-

ter 50998. Its design is the first thing the chapter needs from it: the rule does not require any vehicle to carry a recorder. It governs every recorder a manufacturer chooses to install. And it requires that a retrieval tool be put on the market within ninety days of the first sale of a compliant car, so that the data the rule standardizes can be read by someone other than the maker. The requirement's shape is the book's theme in miniature: the rule does not make the witness, and it guarantees the witness can be heard. The makers built the witness anyway, for their own reasons, the airbag's engineering and the liability's defense, and the rule made the witness legible. Full effect came September 1, 2012, and the five seconds of pre-crash data have been in nearly every new car since. Some fleets carried recorders from the 1990s, the airbag's own engineering needing the crash's data. The book dates the prehistory loosely because the record of it is loose: makers installed, models varied, no census counted the witness until the rules did. The witness has been sitting in the fleet, in growing numbers, for the era of this book's writing. The era the trooper worked predates it entirely. The era this book was written in is covered by it nearly completely. Between those two eras is the witness's whole biography: an engineering tool that became a standard, and a standard that became a census, and a census no certifier was ever told to read.

The recorder's testimony is specific, and its specificity is the chapter's load. In the five seconds before a trigger event, the compliant unit records vehicle speed, engine throttle position, and brake application, and, where the maker records them, steering angle and engine revolutions, the standard's two tiers of elements. At the event itself it records the change in velocity, the belt's status, the airbag's timing. The trigger is a threshold of force, a deployment or a near one, and the record is locked at the trigger. The third chapter's marks vocabulary, the skid

and the yaw and the drift, the absence read at the shoulder, is now the car's own column: the brake's silence is no longer inferred from the pavement. It is stored. The trooper read the road for the marks that were not there. He did it on his knees, in the dark, with a flashlight and a tape, alone on the shoulder while the trucks went by. That was the scene's whole instrument panel, in his years. The modern scene has the not-there written down, ten times a second, by the vehicle itself. The shoulder's whole reading, the one the third chapter taught, is now a printout.

The printout has its own readers, and they are the third chapter's people. The reconstruction profession, the schools and the accreditation the third chapter dated, grew up with the witness: the download is the modern reconstruction's first exhibit, and the patrol's own specialists pull it as a matter of course. The trooper's era read the scene with a tape and a flashlight. The current era reads it with the car's own file. The reading profession modernized. The certifying office did not. The same state pays for both, and the same scene holds both. The reconstructionist's report goes to the crash file, and the certifier's box goes to the certificate, and the two products of the same death can disagree without ever meeting. The disagreement without a meeting is the modern form of the book's oldest gap, the ditch and the desk, and the gap now has the witness's file inside it. The distance between the two professions at the same scene is this chapter's subject. The people who read cars and the people who certify deaths are different people, with different forms, and no rule joins their work.

The fleet's coverage has its own dated figure, and the figure's source discipline is the book's rule stated by example. The estimate that 99.5 percent of model-year 2021 light vehicles carried a compliant recorder comes from a notice of March 17, 2022.

That is a different document from any of the rules this chapter dates, and the two facts never share a citation, in this chapter or anywhere. The coverage figure is the notice's. The recording-period rules are the rules'. The book keeps them apart because a figure's address is part of its truth, and the habit of the book is the habit the count never had. The estimate's own wording matters too: nearly every new car, by the agency's own count of the 2021 model year, carried the witness. The trooper's question has been answerable at scale for the whole time this book was being written. The answering was always available. The asking is what never came.

The lengthening has its own dated sequence, and the sequence is printed because the delay is part of the subject. The witness's memory was deepened by law and the deepening was deferred by law, and both acts are on the record with their dates, and the dates are the country's own pace about the question this book carries. The sequence in full: The December 2024 rule set the twenty seconds at ten samples a second, effective January 17, 2025, with compliance set for September 1, 2027. On November 28, 2025, after petitions from the industry's alliance, from the engineers' society, and from one manufacturer, the agency proposed to move the date. On May 18, 2026, the final rule, at 91 Federal Register 28432, corrected May 27, effective June 17, 2026, adopted a four-year phase-in. A quarter of a maker's fleet complies from September 1, 2028, half from 2029, three-quarters from 2030, and all of it on and after September 1, 2031. The small-volume makers come in at 2032, and the multi-stage vehicles at 2033. The petitions argued implementation and production cycles, and the agency answered with the calendar. The rule says on its own page that the rulemaking is a deregulatory action under Executive Order 14192, the lengthening unchanged in substance and delayed in schedule, the requirements intact

and the calendar moved. The book prints the self-description because the self-description is the era's own voice: the witness's deepening is treated, on the record, as a burden relieved. The twenty-second memory is coming. It is coming later than it was ordered to, by the industry's own request, and the lateness is printed with its dates, because the witness's arrival has a schedule and the schedule is a record too.

What the memory holds for this book's question is exact, and the exactness is the armor's beginning. The five seconds answer the third chapter's reading, column by column. The pre-crash elements of the standard's table, the required ones and the if-recorded ones, sampled twice a second under the old rule and ten times under the new, are the scene's physiology. What the foot did, what the hand did, what the machine was told. The trooper's scene was speed held, throttle open, brake untouched, wheel fixed, into the fixed object. The sleeper's scene reads differently in the columns: the speed's decay, the wheel's drift, the wake-up swerve half a second before the trigger. The drunk's scene reads its own way, the erratic throttle and the wandering angle. The third chapter taught that the three tracks could not be told apart on the pavement. The car's five seconds are the pavement's reading made exact, and the telling-apart is now possible, sometimes, in the columns. The twenty seconds will reach further back down the approach. The recorder shows braking and speed and steering, and intent stays out of reach, and the book concedes it on the page: no column in the standard's table records what the driver meant. The car testifies to the hands and the feet. The mind stays shut. The witness is real, and its testimony is bounded, and the bounding is conceded before any critic concedes it for the book. And yet. The trooper's era's reading ran on absence: no skid marks, no braking, no swerve, read off the pavement at two in the morning by

a man with a flashlight. The recorder makes the absence a positive column. A scene where the throttle held wide and the brake never moved is a different scene, on the car's testimony, from a scene where the brake was stamped too late. The question the car can answer is not what the driver meant. It is whether the driving looked like the trooper's scenes or like the countercase's, and that question is the book's filter, the question whose answer decides whether anyone looks harder. The witness cannot convict. It can flag. And the flag is exactly what the trooper's counties never had.

The flag's availability has its own dates, and the chapter prints them as a window. For the deaths of 2012 to the present, the witness was in nearly every new car, and the fleet's turnover means the witness was in most cars on the road within years of the standard's full effect. The lone crashes of the last fourteen years are answerable scenes, in principle, wherever the car survived to be read. The era's scenes are not. The book's question splits in two along the witness's own calendar. The trooper's years are history, and the current years are practice. The practice is the chapter's indictment, because the current years' scenes are the ones someone could still ask.

Who may hear the testimony is its own law, dated like the rest. The Driver Privacy Act of 2015, enacted within Public Law 114-94 at sections 24301 to 24303, at 129 Statutes 1712 to 1713, makes the retained data the owner's or lessee's property. Access by others is restricted, with exceptions the act enumerates: legal process, the owner's consent, specified federal investigations, emergency response, and qualifying safety research. The exceptions are the country's own list of who may ask: a court, the family, the agency, the rescuers, the researchers. The coroner deciding the manner is not named, and not excluded, and the silence is the act's own answer about which asking the

law imagined. The list was written for the living driver's privacy. The dead driver's folder was not its subject, and the folder is where the book's question lives. The owner's property: the dead driver's memory belongs, in the first instance, to the dead driver's estate, which is the family the mercy was for. The law's own arrangement is the book's tension codified. The witness's testimony is the family's to give or withhold, with a door for process. The process is a subpoena, and a subpoena needs a case, and the case is what the manner box decides whether to open. The certifier who wants the five seconds wants them before the signing, because the signing is the last cheap moment to ask; a subpoena can come later, and almost never does.

The property right lands in the book's oldest column, and the landing is worth a paragraph. The eleventh chapter's mercy economy ran on what the verdict controlled: the policy, the burial, the name. The driver's memory now belongs to the same estate the policy paid. The family that the era spared with a kind box now holds the keys to the witness. A family asked for the download is a family asked to trade the mercy for the truth, one more time, at the worst hour. The law did not resolve the book's tension. It gave the tension a title section and a statute page. The mercy's interests are the witness's owners, and the witness's testimony could undo the mercy. The book prints the arrangement without solving it, because the arrangement is the country's own answer, dated 2015, to the question this book has asked since its first ditch.

The practice on the ground is the chapter's question, and it is put to the ledger precisely. The patrol's reconstructionists pull the download routinely; the tool is on the market because the 2006 rule put it there; the crash report of the current era can carry the car's own numbers in its narrative. The question this book asks is narrower and older: does the coroner read it before

writing accident? Does the county attorney of the fourth chapter's machine, deciding the manner of a lone driver dead against a bridge end, call for the car's five seconds before he signs? The question is not rhetorical inside this book, because the answer determines whether the modern count can be better than the era's count, and the count's improvement is the book's practical hope. The honest box is only as honest as the evidence under it, and the five seconds are the best evidence the scene has ever produced, and the box and the seconds have never been joined by any rule. The question is put to the public record, and the return is printed as the return records it. I ran two search strings across the years 2012 to 2026, looking for any published instance of a coroner, a medical examiner, or a county attorney requesting the recorder's data before certifying a single-vehicle death. Nothing was found. The search was not systematic. The null is a search result, printed with its scope, and never a claim that the practice does not exist. The return's own shape is the finding's shape: the question is askable, the tool is sold, the law has its door, and the public record shows no one walking through it in the years the witness has been standard. The searches found the download everywhere else: in the litigation files, in the reconstruction courses, in the insurers' disputes, everywhere the crash's cost is fought over. The one desk the searches did not find it on is the desk where the manner of death is decided. The witness testifies constantly about whose fault the crash was. About what the crash was, it has never been found testifying at all.

The state where this book's question lives has been given two new instruments inside a decade. The pair is worth one sentence of its own before each is weighed. The fleet gained its memory by 2012, and the state joined the counting system in 2016, and both arrivals postdate every death this book is about.

The instruments are modern. The office they arrived into is the fourth chapter's, unchanged in the statute that matters. Nebraska joined the violent-death reporting system in 2016, and the fifteenth chapter carried what that system sees and what it cannot. The system's manner is assigned from three sources, and the car is not one of them. The certificate, the coroner, the police report: the fifteenth chapter's three documents. The download can ride the third one in when the police report carries it, and nothing requires the report to carry it. The witness in the vehicle and the witness system in the capital meet only by that road, and the road has no tollkeeper. The state's membership means the looking is now funded and staffed at the level of the record, and the record still does not include the five seconds, because no interface asks for them. The county attorney's manner box and the car's memory sit in the same county, and no form joins them, and the joining is nobody's job, which is the fourth chapter's machine seen from its newest side.

The asking practice is easy to picture, because every piece of it exists. A certifier facing a lone night crash in 2026 could hold the signing until the download is read. The tool is on the market by the 2006 rule's requirement. The patrol's reconstructionist already knows how. The owner's property right yields to the family's consent or the court's process. The five seconds cost an afternoon. Nothing in the practice needs inventing.

The book allows itself one thought experiment, labeled as one, because the witness's meaning is clearest against the era's own scene. Take the first chapter's shape: the lone car, the empty two-lane, the bridge end, two in the morning, 1983. Run the same night in 2026. The trooper arrives the same way, and the car remembers: the throttle held open for the whole five seconds, the brake's column empty, the wheel's angle steady to the end. Or the columns say the opposite: the speed wandering,

the wheel sawing, the late stamp of the brake. Neither reading settles intent. Either reading changes the folder. A folder that reads steady-throttle-empty-brake deserves the second look the trooper's scenes never got. A folder that reads wandering-speed-late-brake deserves the countercase's own peace. The witness's gift is the sorting, the same sorting the Finnish teams did with interviews and the car now does from its own memory, and the sorting is what the count has always needed and never had. The era's certifier had the pavement and his judgment. The current certifier has the pavement, his judgment, and the machine's account, and the third of those is the only one that cannot be mercied, because it cannot be charmed the way a memory can. The experiment is a picture of what the asking would see, and it is labeled a picture, and no Nebraska death is claimed under it. The book prints the picture because the practice's cheapness is the finding: the asking was never expensive, never exotic, never beyond a county's means. It was simply never anyone's job. The trooper's question and the car's answer have been in the same state for fourteen years, and the office between them never changed.

Sweden is the standing contrast, and it is named at its width. A system that looks, with its five grades and its psychosocial investigator, is a system that would ask the car as it asks the family. The tenth chapter's countries built the asking into the office. The trooper's state built the asking into no one. The car's memory arrives in both countries on the same shipping dates; the fleet is the same fleet's cousins. What differs is whether anyone's job is to ask for it. The difference is not technological. It is the same difference as every chapter of this book: the machinery of looking, built or never built. The witness's existence is worldwide. The asking is local. The count is the asking's product, here as everywhere the book has looked.

The wider witnesses are held as questions, because the book holds only what it can date and cite. The telematics stream, the connected car's own reporting, and the vehicle that drives itself are named as questions and nothing more. What they will do to the count of these deaths, to the disguise's feasibility, to the scene's readability, is beyond this book's record. The book's rule is to print no future it cannot source. The five seconds are dated. The twenty seconds are dated. The rest is the next book's, or the next inquest's, and the chapter says so and stops.

The trooper's era and the witness's era do not overlap, and the non-overlap is the chapter's sadness, and I will say it once and let it stand. His scenes are unrecoverable, the fifteenth chapter closed them. The closing is double, and the chapter says it plainly: the cars of his years carried no witness, and the cars themselves were crushed, so the scenes are unrecoverable from the vehicle's side too, both memory and machine gone. The salvage yard is the era's archive, and the archive's holdings were cubed. What his era left is the paperwork: the report, the certificate, the weekly's three words. The car that could have answered was towed first, and the towing was routine, and the routine was the era's relationship to the scene: handle it, clear it, file it, forget it. The witness era's own risk is the same routine wearing new equipment: the car remembers, the yard crushes, and the memory is cubed with the machine unless someone asks for it first. The preservation letter of the litigation world exists for exactly this reason. No coroner has been found to need one. The cars that die alone on his roads tonight are carrying the witness he needed. The arithmetic's zero stands in the ledger for his year, and the witness's columns stand in the fleet for the present's. No one has been shown to join them: not in the county where he worked, not in the public record I could search. The evidence the trooper never had has existed in the fleet for four-

teen years. The book's last technical question is whether the asking will ever be built into the office, and the record's answer, as of the dated return, is that no one has been seen asking.

The reader now knows the witness's exact testimony: five seconds, dated, of throttle and brake and wheel, owned by the dead driver's estate, open to process, unread by any certifier I could find. The reader knows the twenty seconds' schedule, and the schedule's own self-description, and the petitions that moved it. The reader knows the coverage estimate's own address, and why the address is kept separate from the rules'. The reader knows the exact width of the search that found no one asking: two strings, fourteen years, one engine, not systematic. The width is printed so the null can be weighed at its true weight, a search's silence and never a proof's, the book's rule about null returns applied to the book's last question. And the reader knows the witness's limit, conceded on the page, because the concession is what keeps the chapter honest about its own hope. The five seconds could fill the folders of the current years with something the era never had, and the filling would still leave the manner box to a person, and the person is still the fourth chapter's machine. The witness changes the evidence. The decider is unchanged. The car shows the hands and feet. The mind stays shut. Intent is still the box's question, decided by a person, in an office, under the same machine the fourth chapter walked through.

The chapter closes as the pair to the second chapter's close. There the era's unseen form sat beside the current form's dated box, the silence beside the fact. Here the same pair lies on the same desk, one generation later. The manner box of the current form, with its six values and its waiting decider. Beside it, a car with a memory, five seconds deep, that no one has been shown to ask. The box is still the box. The witness is new. The desk

they share is the book's question. The question is now the verdict's, because the eighteenth chapter answers what the system is when even the car's testimony arrives and the office's practice has not changed. The trooper's road is still out there, and the cars on it remember, and the remembering goes unread. The unread remembering is the last exhibit the movement enters before the verdict is returned. The second chapter's pair was a fact and a silence. This chapter's pair is a box and a witness. The pair of pairs is the book's machinery in four objects. The four objects are what the eighteenth chapter's verdict must cover: the form, the box, the car, and the count.

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Chapter Eighteen

Undetermined

The two-lane west of Grand Island runs straight under a sky the size of the whole rest of the country. At two in the morning it holds nothing: no headlights ahead, none in the mirror, the road's hum the only sound, the dark fields on both sides going on past any headlight's reach. A car can run for an hour and meet no one. The interstate runs somewhere north of here, taking the trucks, and the two-lane keeps the local dark, and the local dark is where the book's deaths happened.

The last chapter of this inquest opens cold on that road. That road is where the book began and where its question lives, and the question is now the court's. The image is the author's own, and I say so again here, at the end: no trooper ever described this stretch to him, and the stretch stands for all of them. The book's rule about images holds to the last page: what is a figure is labeled a figure, and what is testimony is weighed as testimony, and the two never trade places.

The inquest form has four movements, and this is the verdict. The view of the body was the trooper and his claim: the one witness who stood at the scenes, heard first, tested longest. The witnesses were the ledgers and the journals and the countries and the counties: the federal tables, the suicide studies, the five-grade scale, the machine in the courthouse, the sociology of the count itself. The deliberation weighed the mercy and the suspicion, the countercase and the arithmetic, the two errors in their columns, and priced them both. The verdict now answers in the form the book has carried from the front matter: the seven propositions, adjudicated in order, each returned at

the grade the evidence earned, the seams left visible. A verdict in this form is not a trumpet. It is a ledger line with its sources showing. The book's honesty is in the grading, and the grading is where the verdict begins.

The first proposition, that some road deaths are intentional, returns proven. The countries that looked found them: Finland's teams, Sweden's grades, Queensland's coroners, the series from Maryland to eastern Scotland. The deaths exist, at every width of looking, in every system that ever asked. No part of the book's case needed more than this, and this is proven past any honest dispute. The proposition was once the trooper's own heresy, the thing no one in his counties would hear. It returns proven on the journals' evidence and the countries' counts. The distance between the heresy and the finding is the book's first measurement of the era: the question was answerable the whole time, and the asking was what was missing.

The second, that some intentional road deaths are misclassified, returns proven at the word some. The caveat prints on it once more: a reclassification is a judgment and never a ground truth. The re-readings moved cells from accident to suicide wherever the asking changed, and the moved cells are the proof, and the caveat is the price. Sweden's 2012 table moved the count almost entirely out of the undetermined grade, and the authors' own inference about the deaths inside it printed as theirs. The book prints both, because the verdict that needs the caveat hidden is no verdict I return. The proven-some is enough for every use the book makes of it: the count of these deaths has always depended on the asking, and the asking was the variable, and the deaths were the constant.

The third, that some people intend their deaths to be mistaken for accidents, returns proven at the level of stated belief and no further. The planners' own reports carry it: the man

who wanted it to look like an accident, for the family, for the insurance, in the studies the eleventh chapter held at pattern level. What the belief produces on the roads, no record measures. The proposition is about intent to disguise, and the disguise's success is the book's unanswered arithmetic, and the two are kept apart here at the end as they were at the start. The planner's belief in the disguise is the mercy economy's supply side, the eleventh chapter's finding: the road was chosen because the verdict was believed to control the money and the burial. The belief's existence is documented. The belief's execution is the fourteenth chapter's bounded what-if. The seam between them is the book's most honest inch, and it is left showing.

The fourth, that some certifiers accommodate families, returns supported, near proven, for the accommodation that routes to the honest box. The examiner county's practice rule, printed at second hand and labeled, is the documented form: the highly probable signed as suicide with the family's consent, or as undetermined without it. The 1988 working group's own sentence at page 1446, the book's epigraph of confession, names the pressure the profession built its criteria against. For Nebraska, the proposition is unshown: no practice statement from any Nebraska county exists on this record, and the book says so. The accommodation is documented in the profession. In the trooper's state it is inferred from the machine and never from a man. The grade's two halves are the book's fairness in miniature: the mechanism is real where anyone looked, and unshown where the book's question lives, and both halves print. A verdict that promoted the inference to a finding would be the book's manner-box error, the settling of what the evidence leaves open. The book does not commit, in its last chapter, the sin it has prosecuted for seventeen.

The fifth, that some certifiers certify suspected suicides as

accidents out of mercy, returns held open, and the holding is the book's discipline stated as a verdict grade. The one documented merciful practice routes to undetermined, and the one documented accident-box practice, at a physician's office in New York, ran on political pressure and never on kindness. The mercy-to-accident path is the trooper's whisper's own mechanism, and it is not documented anywhere I could reach. The hypothesis stands open. The book's case does not need it closed, because the sixth proposition is the one the evidence can carry, and the sixth is the one that matters. The fifth is the whisper's own mechanism, mercy signing accident, and the record's documented mercies all route to the honest box, and the difference between the two routings is the difference between the examiner's county and the trooper's. The examiner had a written practice and a consent to ask for. The county attorney had a list and a pen. The open hypothesis is the era's own shape: no one wrote down what the kindness did, because the kindness was the not-writing-down.

The sixth, that the mechanism operated materially in the trooper's Nebraska, returns as the book's two-part answer. At the level of motive, it is a hypothesis: why any Nebraska certifier checked any box is unrecorded and unrecoverable, and the book claims no man's reason. At the level of system type, it is measured. The kind of institution Nebraska runs, the elected coroner with no medical examiner in the chain, certifies fewer suicides than the other kinds, by a margin the twelfth chapter printed from the type-level studies. The mechanism's existence is measured for the kind. Its motives are the deliberation's unanswered question, and the verdict returns that question exactly as the deliberation left it: undetermined.

The seventh, that the undercount affected prevention or planning, returns at the width the book claimed it: impaired vis-

ibility, with the owner named. The planner reads the count to place the barriers and to evaluate them, and a count that cannot see these deaths informs that work worse. Nothing about a death that would otherwise have been prevented is claimed, here or anywhere, because the record cannot carry the chain. The proposition survives at its narrowest width, and the narrowness is the verdict's shape. The narrow claim is still a claim with an owner. The counts this book has shown corrupted are the counts that safety money and prevention money are spent against. The spending's misdirection is the undercount's own ongoing cost, accruing in every plan the count cannot inform. The cost has no widow. The fifteenth chapter's columns are the verdict's inheritance: the ledger's harm, nameless and compounding, stands beside the family's harm, named and deterred, and the seventh proposition is where the ledger's harm enters the verdict.

The middle clause of the verdict follows a decision tree written before the numbers existed, and the tree is printed here, because the choosing is part of the verdict. The three wordings were these. If the type-level studies held, the Nebraska ledger read low or silent, and the neighbors' certified rates differed in the expected direction. The clause would then read: the undercount is structural, the system's kind measurably produces it, and whether mercy was Nebraska's motive stays undetermined. Should the returns be null, the ledger suppressed and the neighbors unremarkable, the clause would read: the undercount is structural by design and by the type-level evidence, and Nebraska's own count can neither confirm nor deny it. Where the returns contradicted, Nebraska's certified rates unremarkable or high, the ledger nonzero at the expected order. The clause would then read: the design permits an undercount that Nebraska's ledger does not display, and the book says why the dis-

play may still miss what the design permits.

Then the returns came in. The type-level studies were read and held. The ledger was run, on September 30, 2026, in the federal files, Nebraska and the nation separately, by residence. The era's code row came back as the fourteenth chapter printed it: zeros and ones and three withheld cells, the conversation year's own cell a counted zero. The modern pair came back with its suppressed cells and its bounded totals. The queries' parameters are printed in the Tables, dated, so that any reader can run them again. The neighbors were run, the first window corrected and rerun. Nebraska's certified rate stood lowest of the six, and its undetermined box stood unswollen beside them. And the tree's third condition could not be met as written, because the comparison cannot show the difference is certification's work. The table's own order refuses the type reading: Iowa's medical-examiner chain stands second-lowest, South Dakota's county coroners stand highest, and Oklahoma's centralized examiners stand beside them at the top. Within the six, system type does not predict the rate, and firearms, rurality, demographics, and population shares sit uncontrolled on all of it. The neighbors' certified rates are unremarkable as evidence of classification, and the tree has its own words for exactly that: the returns are null on the neighbors' branch. The three wordings were written before the extraction, and the returns chose among them, and the clause reads: the undercount is structural by design and by the type-level evidence, and Nebraska's own count can neither confirm nor deny it. The tree was the book's promise to let the evidence choose. The evidence chose. The wording is printed as chosen. All three stand printed, as printed above, so the choosing can be audited. The printing of the choosing is the book's last defense against its own hope: the clause was decided before the numbers, and the numbers decided the clause, and the reader

can audit the sequence.

The verdict has a witness of its own, and the witness is the state's own ledger, carried in the Tables as one three-column account with its sources, and read here in prose. The account's design is the fourteenth chapter's specification, and it governs from first line to last: each column keeps its own geography, its own period, its own classification method, and its own uncertainty, and no cell borrows another cell's meaning. The road column is the Department of Transportation's historical fatality series, persons, located by the crash. It reads: 292 in 1960, the climb through the decade, 489 in 1971, the fall through the trooper's years, 255 in the conversation year, and 227 in 2025. The column counts bodies on roads, by where the crash was, and its figures are the agency's own later compilation, labeled as such.

The suicide column is the state's own publications at their windows, labeled by window. The era's federal compressed file prints 147 certified suicides among Nebraska residents in 1983, residence geography, the vital ledger's count. The current state program's newsletter reports 227 suicide deaths among Nebraskans aged 35 to 55 across 2021 and 2022, 38.5 percent of the total, which reads as roughly 590 across the two years, near 295 a year. The window is labeled, the source is labeled, and the column is never converted into a series the state has not published, because the conversion would be the book's manufacture.

The third column is the certified count in the book's category, extracted from the federal files with its silences choreographed and labeled by cause. E958.5 from 1979, then X82 and Y32 kept separate from 1999. The zeros, the two printed ones, the withheld cells, the suppressed totals. The column is the fourteenth chapter's ledger, carried into the verdict whole, with its

four states intact. Sixty years of the state's own counting, in three columns, on one page of the verdict. The columns disagree in geography and never overlap in error, and the verdict reads them as they are.

Read aloud, the table says this. The roads fell across the trooper's career and kept falling after, a long decline with loud years inside it. The suicide column ran near ten per hundred thousand in the era's own cells, 10.4 in 1982 and 9.3 in 1983, and stands near three hundred a year in the current windows. And the category this book is about shows zero for the conversation year, and a twenty-year row of zeros and ones and withheld cells, and a modern row too suppressed to read. The three columns are the state's own documents, and the third column is the book's subject, and the subject reads: almost nothing was written down, and the almost-nothing is the record. The almost-nothing has a structure, and the structure is the verdict's. A zero where a code existed. A withheld cell where a count was small. An absent category where no code had been invented. An unrecovered file where the era kept no account. The fourteenth chapter taught the four states of silence. The verdict's table holds all four at once, and the holding is the state's answer to the trooper, sixty years long: the count was kept, and the category was left blank, and the blank was the mercy's own signature.

The honest box has its own accounting in the verdict, because the remedy's standing is the book's last doctrinal question. The form's word for it is could not be determined, the current Nebraska form's sixth value, printed from the state's own documentation, the honest word with its own cell in the list.

Beside the form's word stand the two voices the record holds from the state's deciders. The first is a county attorney talking to a reporter, in the Flatwater Free Press's January 2025 in-

vestigation, who said he did not think he had ever checked the box marked unknown. His word for the box is his own, and the form's word is the form's. The two words are set beside each other because the distance between them is the practice's distance: the box exists on the form, and the box lives unused in the office. The unused box is the fifteenth chapter's finding in one man's sentence. The second voice is the 2008 Legislature's survey, the interim study's appendix: a county attorney answering that no one reviews the cause or manner of death, that law enforcement investigates and the coroner determines. The answer is the machine describing itself, the joined office's account of its checks: none.

The manual's own instruction is the fourth chapter's: the county attorney selects the manner from a list. The interviews that might have added more voices were not held, and the book prints the sentence its rule requires: Nebraska's deciders are heard in this record through a reporter and a survey, and no further. The sentence is a confession of the record's width, printed where a wider record would have stood, and the verdict rests on nothing wider.

What the arrangement was believed to protect is stated as belief and confirmed nowhere, and the verdict keeps it as belief. A widow's insurance, inside the clause window. A church burial, under the old rules' shadow. A son's belief that his father was unlucky. The three are the mercy economy's own ledger, the kindness's accounts payable, and the book has carried them since the eleventh chapter priced them.

The eleventh chapter priced all three at their documents: the 1885 clause, the canon's history, the town's understanding. No contested case from the era returned, and no church rule of the era's Nebraska parishes was recovered. The protections stand in the book as the beliefs the mercy served, never as outcomes

the mercy bought. The kindness's invoice is real. Its line items are beliefs about what would have happened otherwise, and the book says so, because the verdict cannot rest on a counterfactual any more than on a guess. The widow kept the policy if the policy would have paid, and the policy would have paid if the clause did not reach, and the chain of ifs is printed as a chain of ifs. The mercy's value was real to the families either way, and the value's reality is the book's concession to the arrangement, made here at the end without retreating from the count.

The bill is carried at the same width as the seventh proposition: impaired visibility, the owner named. And one exhibit is set beside it as the proof that a count produces inquiry: Sweden's own action-plan commitment to research on these deaths, the state that counts them paying to study them, the ledger funding its own improvement. A state that writes the deaths down learns more about what it wrote. A state that writes nothing down has nothing to fund against, and the funding follows the count it has. The exhibit is Sweden's, the lesson is the book's, and the lesson is priced at the width shown and no wider. The action plan's research commitment is carried at the width the record holds. The looking pays for more looking. The not-looking pays for nothing, and bills the difference to every future plan.

The mechanism's other home is named in one paragraph, bounded to what its evidence supports. The overdose is the modern manner box's crowded neighbor: the drug deaths that arrive intentless-looking, where the same certification choices run. Rockett's work from 2010 forward and the 2012 reliability review carry the mechanism there, and this book prints no percentage, because the bounded record supports the mechanism's presence and never its size. The overdose column is the book's proof that the machinery it describes is not a museum piece. The same county offices, the same manner box, the same

mercy and the same pressure, running tonight, on a larger row of the ledger than the road ever produced. The book's subject stays the road. The mechanism's other home is named so the reader knows the machinery's market share. Wherever intent must be proved from a body and a scene, the negotiation the twelfth chapter printed goes on, and the honest box's two uses go on with it.

The arrangement's present standing is dated and sourced. Nebraska is the only state where the county attorney always acts as coroner, by the Flatwater investigation's own reporting. The prosecutor is still coroner in ninety-three counties. A handful of Washington counties left the arrangement on the first of January 2025, under that state's own 2021 statute, and Nebraska may be the last state of its kind. The standing is dated by the reporting that established it, January 2025, and the book carries the date because standings move. The twelfth chapter's type-level measurement is set beside the standing: the kind of system Nebraska is measurably certifies fewer suicides than the other kinds. The machine the fourth chapter walked through is still on the state's books, still deciding, and the measured direction of its kind is the undercount's direction, and the state's own ledger reads low and silent. That is what the record shows about Nebraska, and the verdict's middle clause is exactly this much and no more.

The trooper's corrected shape is stated here at the end, because the verdict is partly about him. Right in kind: the deaths existed, the filing pattern existed, the machinery that produced both existed, and he saw them from the ditch, and no one in print in his state was saying them. Unmeasurable in proportion: his usually was a memory's count, and the countercase priced it, and the arithmetic bounded it, and the ledger cannot return it. And differently shaped on other roads: the Nordic head-on

against the truck is not his empty-road shape, and the countries' counts are not his count, and the shape he knew was his road's, the loneliest one. He was a witness, and the book weighed him as one, and the weighing is the verdict's human content. The inquest's form owes the finder of the body the first hearing, and the first chapter gave it. The verdict owes him the last accounting: what he was right about, what he overshot, and what his account can never be used for. Right about the kind. Wrong about the size, where any size can be tested. Unusable as a measure, usable as the alarm. The book was built because his alarm was true and his arithmetic was unprovable, and both halves of that sentence are the verdict on him.

The book's thesis sentence is printed once here, where the evidence has earned it: mercy makes uncertainty look settled, in either direction. The kindness signed the certain word over the thin file. The suspicion would have done the same in the other box. Both directions are the same act: the certainty printed over the unknown. The seventeenth chapter's witness and the fourth chapter's machine meet in that sentence, because the sentence explains both of them: the box settles what the scene leaves open, and the car's unread testimony is the settling's modern waste.

The era's machinery made the settling easy and the asking expensive. The count is what the settling produced, and the count was read as the truth of the state's roads for sixty years. The truth was a production, the twelfth chapter's finding, and the production's pressures were the working group's own confession, and the confession was printed in 1988 while the counties went on as before. The verdict does not ask the reader to despise the producers. It asks the reader to see the production. The seeing is the whole sentence's work, and the sentence is the whole book's, and the book ends where the sentence can finally

be read with all its evidence attached, graded, and priced.

And now the verdict sentence itself, delivered once, in the words the book has held back since the front matter. Undetermined cannot fix the count, and it keeps the count from claiming what it does not know.

The sentence's two clauses are the two halves of the book, and each is opened once. The honest box cannot fix the count. It cannot add a single death back to any ledger, it cannot reach the crushed cars, and the fifteenth chapter weighed its misuse as the accommodation's other door. The past is unrecoverable, and the box does not change that, and the book's arithmetic stays bounded regardless.

What it can do, used honestly, is keep the count honest. A column that says the county does not know, printed beside the column that says accident, so that no one ever again reads a settled certainty where the evidence ran out. The remedy is the smallest one available, and it is the only one the record supports. The count must stop claiming what it does not know. The box that says so must be used. The using requires the looking, and the looking is the reform the whole book reduces to. No re-litigation of the era's files, no count of the dead revised upward on a book's say-so, no estimate printed where the ledger is silent. The verdict asks the machinery for exactly one change: that when the evidence runs out, the box that says so is the box that gets checked. No one on this record checked it. The current form carries it, and whether the era's form carried it, no one can say, because the era's form is unseen. The asking is the whole reform.

The author's own decision belongs in the verdict, because it changes his conduct as a witness. He carried the trooper's sentence for forty-three years and set it in print with its usually intact. He will not claim the usually again. When he tells the story

now, he tells it corrected. A man who saw something real and sized it past what the record could prove, in a state whose machinery made his size uncheckable, in an era whose forms gave his scenes nowhere to go. The conversation's truth is settled as far as the record settles anything. It happened. It was about the count. The count was the county's way of living with what it could not ask, and the way of living was the book's subject, and the subject is now closed. I think of him at the end of this the way I picture him first: an old man at an office door, careful with his words, carrying a count he could not prove and could not put down. The office door is my picture, not the record. I never knew where we sat, and the book has said so from its first page. He gave me the question and the book is the answer, and the answer came back kinder than the question and truer than the claim. He is the last witness called, and his testimony is this book, and his correction is its final exhibit. The decision costs him the better story, and the book says so. The remembered conversation was a playwright's gift, the claim told low in an afternoon's interview. The corrected version is harder to tell and truer to tell, and the conduct that changes is the telling. From now on the story carries its grade. Usually is retired. The word was the trooper's, and the book returns it to him, corrected, with the record's answer in its place: some, hidden, uncounted, uncountable now, and real.

The verdict's summary is this. The reader knows which of the seven claims the inquest returned proven, which narrowed, and which it could not decide. The first two, proven. The third, proven at belief. The fourth, supported for the honest box and unshown for Nebraska. The fifth, held open. The sixth, measured at the type level and undetermined at the motive. The seventh, at impaired visibility. The grades are the book's accounting of itself, and they are printed in a row so the reader

can hold the inquest in one look.

The reader knows what the state wrote down for sixty years: the road column's fall, the suicide column's level, and the third column's zeros and withheld cells. And the reader knows what the state never read: the scenes, the cars, and its own honest box. The three unread things are the book's three futures: the scene that could still be worked, the witness that could still be asked, the box that could still be checked. The verdict's last word about the record is the record's word for the work remaining. Everything this book could not establish is left standing in the book's box, marked as the form marks it: could not be determined. The marking is the book's final fidelity.

The book closes on the image it opened its case on, and the image now carries the inquest. The two-lane west of Grand Island at two in the morning, the dark fields, the empty hour. The needle holding against its peg: the car's five seconds now, the era's silence then, and the witness waiting for someone whose job it is to ask. The ledger with its three columns, the zeros and the ones and the withheld cells, the state's own handwriting about its own dead. The claim check, dated and paid, the mercy economy's receipt, the widow's winter and the system's blind spot in the same signature. The inquest's four movements are complete, and the form is folded, and the road runs on. And over all of it, the sentence the book was written to earn, the title landing on the last page, with no coda after it: the count is the mercy, and the road keeps the rest.

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The Tables

Every figure the book uses lives here, dated, with its denominator and its source, under the table specification of Chapter Fourteen: for every figure, the population, the geography, the period, the road-user category, the numerator, the denominator, the inclusion rules, the classification method, and the uncertainty status. Cells are printed as the ledgers printed them. A cell marked Suppressed is a count between 1 and 9 that the federal file withholds to protect the dead's families. A cell marked "no row returned" is a national cell that returned nothing and blocked its totals row for suppression constraints; it reads as a small withheld count, never as a zero. A cell marked "not recovered" is a planned silence: the figure exists or existed somewhere, and I do not hold it.

Table A. The year of the exercise: Nebraska, 1982 and 1983

Figure	1982	1983	Source and status
Road deaths (persons, by crash)	261	255	Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts 1982, author's copy; 1983 from the Department of Transportation's historical fatality table (updated July 2, 2026), a later compilation; the 1983 edition of the booklet agrees

Fatal crashes	226	221	Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts 1982, author's copy; the 1983 edition, located in the state documents archive
Fatal crashes beginning with a lone vehicle	84	72	Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts 1982, author's copy; the 1983 edition's first-harmful-event table, fixed object 41 and overturned 31; a first event, never a count of lone deaths
Counties with no road deaths	30 of 93	22 of 93	Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts 1982, author's copy; the 1983 edition's geographic summary
Certified suicides (residents, all methods)	164	147	CDC WONDER, Compressed Mortality File, codes E950-E959, residence geography, queried September 30, 2026
Population	1,583,033	1,584,550	The same file's own printed denominators
Crash suicides certified (E958.5)	0	0	The same file, the book's category

Table B. The certified count in the book's category, by year, Nebraska and the United States

Underlying cause of death, all ages, both sexes, all races, residence geography, rates per 100,000 where the file prints them. Queried September 30, 2026, from CDC WONDER: the Compressed Mortality File 1979-1998 (ICD-9, code E958.5, suicide and

self-inflicted injury by crashing of motor vehicle), Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2020 (ICD-10, X82 intentional self-harm by crashing of motor vehicle; Y32 crashing of motor vehicle, undetermined intent), and Underlying Cause of Death 2018-2024, Single Race. The overlap years 2018-2020 match exactly between the two ICD-10 files. From 1968 through 1978 the coding scheme carried no crash-suicide category at all; such a death could file only into E958, other and unspecified means, which counted 404 deaths nationally in 1975.

E958.5, 1979-1998

Year	Nebraska	United States
1979	0	46
1980	0	39
1981	1	37
1982	0	57
1983	0	49
1984	0	58
1985	0	47
1986	0	42
1987	0	69
1988	1	50
Total	Suppressed (5 to 9)	1,487
Year	Nebraska	United States
1989	0	64
1990	Suppressed	67
1991	0	91
1992	Suppressed	100
1993	0	108
1994	0	110
1995	0	109
1996	Suppressed	87
1997	0	124
1998	0	133

X82, 1999-2020

Year	Nebraska	United States
1999	Suppressed	87
2000	0	103
2001	0	91
2002	Suppressed	112
2003	Suppressed	104
2004	Suppressed	108
2005	Suppressed	113
2006	0	137
2007	Suppressed	131
2008	Suppressed	129
2009	Suppressed	104
Total	30	3,049
Year	Nebraska	United States
2010	Suppressed	114
2011	Suppressed	149
2012	Suppressed	167
2013	Suppressed	191
2014	Suppressed	177
2015	0	174
2016	Suppressed	165
2017	Suppressed	171
2018	0	190
2019	0	171
2020	Suppressed	161

Y32, 1999-2020

Year	Nebraska	United States
1999	0	30
2000	0	41
2001	Suppressed	22
2002	0	27
2003	Suppressed	17
2004	0	21
2005	0	26
2006	0	18
2007	0	22
2008	0	17
2009	0	19
Total	Suppressed (5 to 9)	447 printed, plus the withheld 2016 cell
Year	Nebraska	United States
2010	0	13
2011	Suppressed	16
2012	0	29
2013	0	14
2014	Suppressed	16
2015	0	13
2016	Suppressed	no row returned
2017	0	12
2018	0	19
2019	0	22
2020	0	33

X82 and Y32, 2018-2024 (single-race file)

Year	NE X82	US X82	NE Y32	US Y32
2018	0	190	0	19
2019	0	171	0	22
2020	Suppressed	161	0	33
2021	Suppressed	157	Suppressed	36

2022	Suppressed	169	0	19
2023	0	174	0	Suppressed
2024	0	178	0	10
Total	Suppressed (3 to 9, 2020 shared with the table above)	1,200	1 to 9	139 printed, plus the withheld 2023 cell

Table C. The road ledger, Nebraska, persons killed, located by the crash

From the Department of Transportation's historical fatality table, a later compilation, verified at its page; persons, never crashes, drivers, or intents. 1960: 292. 1961: 322. 1962: 401. 1963: 349. 1964: 450. 1965: 386. 1966: 425. 1967: 445. 1968: 452. 1969: 422. 1970: 412. 1971: 489. 1972: 485. 1973: 433. 1974: 388. 1975: 376. 1976: 402. 1977: 350. 1978: 350. 1979: 330. 1980: 396. 1981: 378. 1982: 261. 1983: 255. 1984: 285. 1985: 237. And the recent row: 2015: 246. 2016: 218. 2017: 228. 2018: 230. 2019: 248. 2020: 233. 2021: 221. 2022: 244. 2023: 227. 2024: 251. 2025: 227.

The state's suicide totals, as the state publishes them, at their windows and never converted into a series: 147 residents in 1983 and 164 in 1982 by the federal compressed file; and by the state violent-death program's 2026 newsletter, 227 suicide deaths among Nebraskans aged 35 to 55 across 2021 and 2022, 38.5 percent of the program's total, reading as roughly 590 across the two years, near 295 a year.

Table D. The band: the careful re-readings, each in its own row

From the 2024 review's Table 2 (Radun, Kannan, Partonen, and Hawton), verified at the page, and the studies' own records. Nothing is portable across rows; each share owns its denominator.

Study	Place and years	Finding	Denominator
Schmidt and colleagues, 1977	Maryland, six years	1.7 percent judged suicides	total fatal crashes in a series of 182 fatally injured drivers
Kuroda and Pounder, 1994	eastern Scotland	1.9 percent and 1.5 percent	driver deaths; all road deaths
Yelo and colleagues, 2021	Queensland, 2011-2015	2.9 percent certified, 4.7 percent with possibles; six of fourteen possible cases left open or undetermined	761 driver deaths
Öhberg, Penttilä, and Lönnqvist, 1997	Finland, 1987-1991	84 judged suicides of 99 suspected, 5.9 percent against 2.6 in the official count	1,419 driver deaths
Hernetkoski and Keskinen, 1998	Finland	1.1 percent in 1974-75 rising to 7.4 percent in 1991-92	fatal crashes
Radun and colleagues, 2019	Finland, 2009-2013	11.2 to 17.6 percent by year; 138 of 180 by car into a heavy vehicle	driver suicides in the in-depth data

Law and colleagues, 2024	Australia, 2001-2017	640 classified road-collision suicides against 41,890 suicides by other methods, about 1.5 percent of all suicides	a classified cohort; not a study of the hidden fraction
Andersson and Sokolowski, 2022	Sweden, the 2012 comparison	22 suicides without extended psychosocial investigation, 36 with it, a 63 percent increase, almost entirely from the undetermined grade	the same year's road deaths, classified twice
The 2024 review's Table 2	eleven countries, fifty-one studies	the spread runs from 0.5 percent to about ten percent	national databases, each row its own

The Nordic shares are shown and never transferred to Nebraska. The band has no floor. The article's sentence that careful reviews settle on a floor of about two percent is corrected in Chapter Fourteen: no source I could stand behind carries it.

Table E. Sweden's five grades, the 2012 comparison

The scale: certain suicide; strong support for suicide; not possible to determine; an accident nearly certain; certain accident. The same year's road deaths classified twice, without and with extended psychosocial investigation, as Andersson and Sokolowski report it in the Journal of Safety Research, 2022.

Grade	Without the investigation	With the investigation
Certain suicide	10	14
Strong support for suicide	12	22
Not possible to determine	20	8
An accident nearly certain	7	5
Certain accident	273	273
Total	322	322
The two suicide grades combined	22	36

The share of road deaths classified as suicide: 6.8 percent, then 11.2 percent. The suicide grades gained fourteen; the undetermined grade gave up twelve of them, which is why the rise came, in the authors' own words, almost entirely from the undetermined grade. The authors' inference that twelve of the twenty undetermined cases were suicides is printed as theirs, because the table gives category totals and never one death's path. The certain accidents did not move at all.

Table F. The neighbors, 2020-2024, pooled

Age-adjusted rates per 100,000, 2000 United States standard population, residence geography, queried October 1, 2026, from CDC WONDER (Underlying Cause of Death 2018-2024, Single Race; the file's own five most recent years). Suicide: X60-X84. Undetermined intent: Y10-Y34. System types from the CDC Public Health Law Program's Coroner/Medical Examiner Laws state pages (published January 15, 2015; reviewed May 2024), with North Dakota's from the same program's mirrored page. An earlier printing of this table mislabeled a seven-year extraction as

the five-year span; the figures below are the five-year span, rerun and dated.

State	System	Suicide deaths	Age-adjusted rate	Undetermined deaths	Age-adjusted rate
Nebraska	County-based coroner; the county attorney is ex officio coroner	1,458	15.0	85	0.9
Iowa	County medical examiners, with a state medical examiner office	2,743	17.3	209	1.3
Kansas	District-based coroner	2,777	19.1	210	1.4
South Dakota	County-based coroner	958	21.7	33	0.8
North Dakota	County-based coroner, with a state forensic examiner office	746	19.7	46	1.2
Oklahoma	Centralized statewide medical examiner	4,357	21.6	304	1.5

The crude rates tell the same order at every step but the top, where Oklahoma and South Dakota trade places: Nebraska 14.8, Iowa 17.1, Kansas 18.9, South Dakota 21.1, North Dakota 19.1, Oklahoma 21.6. The table prints bare here, without conclusions, as the book committed to do before the query was run. The fifteenth chapter weighs it, with its limits named: five years, six states, and every difference a state's firearms, rurality, and demographics could also explain. The neighbors are the nearest states with their systems named, never a sample.

Table G. The federal alcohol figures

From NHTSA's Traffic Safety Facts, 2024 data, the alcohol-impaired driving edition, verified at the page: 11,904 deaths in

crashes with at least one alcohol-impaired driver, 30 percent of the year's 39,254 traffic fatalities, impairment defined at 0.08 grams per deciliter. The agency's own caution: the term does not indicate that a crash or fatality was caused by alcohol impairment, only that an alcohol-impaired driver was involved. Blood-alcohol concentrations are estimated where test results are unknown. Among drivers in fatal crashes: 31 percent impaired at night (6 p.m. to 5:59 a.m.) against 10 percent by day; 32 percent in single-vehicle fatal crashes against 14 percent in multivehicle; 28 percent on weekends against 15 percent on weekdays. Nebraska's row in the state table: 251 deaths, 75 of them in alcohol-impaired crashes, 30 percent, the national share exactly. The era's figure prints as the article's own and unverified at its original table: 57.3 percent of traffic deaths alcohol-related in 1982, under the era's wider net of any measurable alcohol, never compared with the current line. Fatigue, from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety: drowsiness in 8.8 to 9.5 percent of studied crashes (2018, cameras in 3,500 drivers' cars, no fatal crash in the sample), and an estimated 17.6 percent of fatal crashes 2017-2021 involving a drowsy driver, a model's estimate and labeled as one.

Table H. The national road ledger, the trooper's FARS years and now

From NHTSA's fatality series table, verified at the page. FARS began in 1975; the trooper's years before it have no federal census. 1975: 44,525. 1976: 45,523. 1977: 47,878. 1978: 50,331. 1979: 51,093. 1980: 51,091. 1981: 49,301. 1982: 43,945. 1983: 42,589. And now: 2024: 39,254.

Table I. The certifier-type effects

From the studies' abstracts, verified at the abstract, and printed with their directions and nothing beyond. Klugman, Condran, and Wray (2013): elected coroners certify slightly fewer suicides than medical examiners and appointed coroners, and appointed investigators underreport less than elected coroners, who are subject to greater public pressure. Fernandez and Jayawardhana (2024): coroners-only states underreported suicides and performed fewer autopsies than states with a medical examiner in the chain, and required coroner training did not significantly affect the determinations. Nebraska is a coroners-only state with elected certifiers and a 2009 training law; the direction of both measurements runs against its kind.

Table J. The statutes and rules quoted in this book

Nebraska Revised Statute 23-1210 (the county attorney is ex officio county coroner; from Laws 1915, chapter 224, section 1, page 493). Section 23-1820 (the coroner's physician certifies cause). Section 23-1801 (the inquest, at the statute's own width). Section 23-1824 (the 1999 child-autopsy mandate, with its exemption for death by trauma resulting from an accident, absent suspicious circumstances). Sections 44-503(2) and 44-502(5) (the suicide clause and its limits). The 1974 testing act (examination and testing of dead drivers for alcohol and drugs, the four-hour rule, results tabulated monthly with identity sealed). LB 46 (1999). LB 671 (2009): introduced as a region-based state medical examiner, amended on the floor to a coroner-training law, passed 47-0-2, approved May 27, 2009, producing section 23-1213.03. LR 276 (2009, with Appendix D). The County Attor-

ney Manual for Filing Death Certificates (revision of July 2021, page 10): the manner of death is selected from a list of six values: natural, suicide, accident, homicide, pending investigation, and could not be determined. ANSI D16.1-2007, sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.4 (suicide within deliberate intent; deliberate intent excluded from an accident, printed pages 18-19). The 1885 policy provision reproduced in Jarman, at 187 U.S. 200-201: "in case of the self-destruction of the holder of this policy, whether voluntary or involuntary, sane or insane, ... this policy shall become null and void," and, in the same policy, the company's undertaking "that in the case of the suicide of the holder of this policy, then this company will pay to his widow and heirs or devisees such an amount of his policy as the member shall have paid to this company on the policy in assessments on the same without interest." The Missouri suicide statute the case turned on, section 5982 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri of 1879, in force in 1885: "In all suits upon policies of insurance on life hereafter issued by any company doing business in this state, it shall be no defense that the insured committed suicide, unless it shall be shown to the satisfaction of the court or jury trying the cause that the insured contemplated suicide at the time he made his application for the policy, and any stipulation in the policy to the contrary shall be void." 49 CFR Part 563 (71 FR 50998, August 2006). 89 FR 102810 (December 18, 2024). 91 FR 28432 (May 18, 2026, corrected May 27, effective June 17, 2026). Public Law 114-94, sections 24301-24303 (129 Stat. 1712-1713, the Driver Privacy Act of 2015). Executive Order 14192.

Planned silences

The monthly alcohol and drug tabulations the 1974 act required: not recovered; where they went is unrecorded. The 1983 Ne-

braska crash detail is partly recovered: the 1983 edition of the state booklet, dated June 1, 1984, surfaced in the state's online documents archive in October 2026, carrying the year's 221 fatal crashes, the 72 lone-vehicle first events, and the 22 counties without a road death. Nebraska driver deaths for 1982 and 1983 remain unavailable in every ledger reached; the first permitted column of Chapter Fourteen prints its empty cell. The era's crash-report form and its code list: unrecovered; no form is described that I have not seen. The 1983 certificate form's instruction: unrecovered. Any inquest ever held for a lone crash in the era: unrecorded. Each silence is labeled here as it is in the text: a hole, printed as a hole.

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Glossary

The book's working words, in the book's own senses. Where a term belongs to a specific document, the document is named.

Accident. A manner of death, and the word this book watches most closely. As a box on a certificate it means a death unintended. As a word in a news sentence it can read as exoneration, which is why the Associated Press cautioned against it in 2016 where negligence is claimed or proven. The trooper's category died inside this box. (Chapters Two, Four, Sixteen.)

Age-adjusted rate. A death rate recomputed against a standard population, so places with different age structures can be compared. The neighbors' table uses the 2000 United States standard. (The Tables.)

Avalanche of printed numbers. Ian Hacking's phrase for the nineteenth-century states' discovery that printing numbers was a way of governing. The suicide rate was one of its first products. (Chapter Twelve.)

The band. The range of shares the careful re-reading studies found: from half a percent to about ten percent of road deaths, each study with its own denominator. The band has no floor. (Chapters Nine, Fourteen; the Tables.)

Cause of death. The injury or disease that killed: the crashed car's trauma. Distinct from manner, which is the box's answer about intent. (Chapter Two.)

Compressed Mortality File. The National Center for Health Statistics' county-level mortality and population file, queried here for 1979-1998 (ICD-9) and joined by the Underlying Cause of

Death files for 1999-2020 and 2018-2024. Residence geography. (Chapters Fourteen, Eighteen; the Tables.)

Coroner; medical examiner; county attorney. The coroner is the county's death certifier, often elected, often a layman. The medical examiner is a physician certifier, usually appointed. In Nebraska the county attorney is ex officio county coroner: the prosecutor certifies the death. (Chapter Four.)

Could not be determined. The honest box's own words on the current Nebraska certificate, the sixth value in the county attorney's list. Set beside a county attorney's own word for the same box, unknown, in Chapter Eighteen. The Glossary's word for the honest box is the form's own.

Deliberate intent. The traffic standard's own category. ANSI D16.1-2007 includes suicide within deliberate intent at section 2.4.2 and excludes sets of events resulting from deliberate intent from the definition of an accident at section 2.4.4. An ascertained suicide leaves the traffic ledger by construction: the exit door. (Chapter Two.)

Distance Rule. The book's own rule for the dead, named in A Note on Evidence: the dead are described at pattern level and never reconstructed; no individual Nebraska death is staged from a paper or a record; and the criteria literature's working details appear once, stated as criteria and never as instructions. (A Note on Evidence; Chapters Three, Eight.)

E958.5; X82; Y32. The codes for the book's category. E958.5, under ICD-9 from 1979: suicide and self-inflicted injury by crashing of motor vehicle. X82, under ICD-10 from 1999: intentional self-harm by the same means. Y32: the same crash, undetermined intent. The era before 1979 had no such code. (Chapters Two, Fourteen; the Tables.)

Event data recorder. The car's own witness: a standard-governed unit recording speed, throttle, brake, steering, and more for the five seconds before a crash trigger, in nearly every new car since September 1, 2012, under 49 CFR Part 563. The December 2024 rule lengthens the memory to twenty seconds at ten samples a second, phased in from September 1, 2028. (Chapter Seventeen.)

Exit door. See deliberate intent.

FARS. The Fatality Analysis Reporting System, the federal census of fatal traffic crashes, from 1975. It counts the crash, not the intent; an ascertained suicide leaves it by the exit door. (Chapters Two, Thirteen.)

Felo de se. The old law's name for the self-murderer, the felon of himself, whose property was forfeited and whose body went to the crossroads. The juries' workaround is at non compos mentis. (Chapter Eleven.)

The honest box. The undetermined cell, in all its names: undetermined, could not be determined, unknown, not possible to determine. Used as an expression of uncertainty, it is the count's conscience. Used as an accommodation, it is the mercy's other door. The difference is whether anyone looked. (Chapter Fifteen.)

Lone-vehicle first event. The state booklet's column: a fatal crash whose first event was a single vehicle. Eighty-four of Nebraska's 226 fatal crashes in 1982 began with one; seventy-two of the 221 in 1983. A first event is a crash's opening moment, and the book's arithmetic never multiplies it, because no study's share owns that denominator. (Chapter Fourteen.)

Manner of death; the manner box. The certifier's answer to what the death was: natural, suicide, accident, homi-

cide, pending investigation, or, in Nebraska, could not be determined, selected from a list by the county attorney. (Chapters Two, Four.)

Non compos mentis. Not of sound mind: the verdict the old juries returned to spare the dead the felon's forfeiture and burial. The mercy is centuries older than the road. (Chapter Eleven.)

NVDRS. The National Violent Death Reporting System, the federal surveillance system that assigns its own manner from three sources: the certificate, the coroner's report, the police report. A death coded undetermined enters it by design; an accident-coded road death enters only if another record calls it suicide. Nebraska joined in 2016. (Chapters Two, Fifteen, Seventeen.)

Occurrence and residence. The two geographies of the count. The road ledger locates a death by where the crash happened; the vital ledger by where the dead person lived. The book never lays one over the other. (Chapter Fourteen.)

Operational Criteria. The profession's own checklist: Rosenberg and colleagues, 1988, self-infliction and intent, with explicit or implicit evidence, and no written note required in every case. Its abstract confesses the pressures it was built against. (Chapters Three, Twelve.)

Psychological autopsy. The Los Angeles center's method, from 1958 and 1963: the reconstruction of a dead person's state of mind from the living who knew them. Built for equivocal deaths; never run in the trooper's counties. (Chapter Six.)

Residence. See occurrence.

Sensitivity exercise. Chapter Fourteen's own form: a set of what-ifs with every assumption shown, no point estimate, no

interval, and the certified count never subtracted. The chapter's license and its limit in one word.

Skid, yaw, drift. The track's vocabulary: the locked wheel's mark, the rotating car's mark, the held line's absence of marks. The trooper's reading ran on the absence. The car now records the columns the marks only implied. (Chapters Three, Seventeen.)

Subintentioned death. Shneidman's 1963 coinage, cited as a work: the death the self hastens without naming. The ancestor of the road question's vocabulary. (Chapter Six.)

Suicide clause. The policy provision refusing payment for a suicide within the policy's first years, two years in the era's forms. The widow inside the clause window is the mercy economy's priced party. (Chapter Eleven.)

Suppressed. The federal files' withholding of a sub-national count between 1 and 9, to protect the dead's families. Nebraska's modern cells in the book's category are mostly suppressed: bounded, and never readable year by year. (Chapter Fourteen; the Tables.)

Undetermined. See the honest box. Its two uses, uncertainty and accommodation, are the fifteenth chapter's whole weighing.

What-if. See sensitivity exercise.

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A Note on Sources

This book was built from documents, and its rules about them are the same rules the chapters keep. Documents first: statutes, reports, codes, rules, and papers, each one carried at the width I actually read it. A source read at the page is presented at the page. A source known from its abstract, its record, or another work's table is carried at exactly that width and says so. A source known only from a second hand is labeled "reported at second hand" in those words, or it does not print. A search that returned nothing is reported as nothing found, with the search's scope stated, and never as a thing that never happened.

The official documents were read at their texts. Nebraska's statutes and bills in the Legislature's public archive; the 1916 opinion in its reporter; the United States Supreme Court cases in theirs; the Federal Register rules at their pages and dates; the traffic standard at its printed pages; the Vatican's text of the 1983 Code; the medical examiners' guide at pages 5 and 8; the federal definitions at pages 21 and 23; the 1988 operational criteria's confession at page 1446; the federal alcohol fact sheet read whole; the state's historical fatality table inspected cell by cell. The proceedings volume of the 1970 examiner's conference was read at the page in a full-view library scan, pp. 42 through 45 and the discussion that follows them, in a single sitting.

The mortality ledger was run on September 30, 2026, in CDC WONDER's public files: the Compressed Mortality File 1979-1998, Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2020, and Underlying Cause of Death 2018-2024, Single Race. The queries were run from the live forms, Nebraska and the United States separately, residence geography, all ages and both sexes, with suppressed and zero cells shown where the forms allow, and the full re-

sults pages with the service's own query criteria were exported and preserved. The neighbors' comparison was run September 30, 2026, and rerun October 1, 2026, after its window was found mislabeled, 2020 through 2024 pooled, age-adjusted to the 2000 standard population. The book committed to printing the neighbors' result before the query was run, and it prints in Chapter Fifteen's weighing and in the Tables, either way.

The searches for practice, the two that print nulls, are stated with their scopes. For a study of trooper or highway-patrol lore: two search strings in the fall of 2026, nothing found, not systematic. For a coroner, medical examiner, or county attorney reading a car's recorder data before certifying a single-vehicle death: two search strings across 2012 to 2026, nothing found, not systematic. Both nulls are search results and never proofs.

No interviews were conducted for this book. The book's own rules permitted two kinds, county attorneys on the record about practice and the trades about the lore, and neither was held. The reason is owed plainly, because the book's whole argument is about looking: the author has no newsroom behind him, and no sitting county attorney was going to tell him, on the record, how he decides which deaths were suicides. The two kinds were designed so they could have been tried, and they were not tried. The cost of that is real, and the book pays it in the open: Nebraska's deciders are heard here through a reporter's 2025 investigation and a 2008 legislative survey, and no further, and every claim about their practice is built to stand on documents alone.

The author's own holdings are named where they are used. The 1982 edition of Nebraska Traffic Accident Facts, read from his own copy. The 1983 edition of the same booklet is the state's documents archive's, located there and read at the page. The county weeklies of his Nebraska years, read in those years and

quoted as his reading and never as a corpus. The article this book corrects and extends, which is his. The play of 1984, which is his. And the remembered conversation, which is his to answer for, and which the eighteenth chapter answers for.

Corrections the book makes to its own foundations print where they stand: the two-percent floor is corrected in Chapter Fourteen; the Finnish transfer is withdrawn there; the article's 57.3 percent prints as the article's and unverified; the epidemiology of the trooper's "usually" is conceded in Chapter Thirteen. My files hold the query exports and the correction history, and any reader who wants the queries run again can run them: the public files are public, and the parameters are in the Tables.

The safe-messaging rule governed the endings, the epigraphs, and the Questions for Discussion before they locked: no methods, no instructions, no invented people, no staged encounters, and one question asked of the whole: what does this book appear to promise a vulnerable person. The answer the book intends is: help is real, the count matters, and the dead were worth counting honestly. The audit was the author's own, and the book says so; no independent reviewer has conducted a safe-messaging review of this text.

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Sources by Chapter

The works each chapter leans on, in the order of the book. Full forms are in the Select Bibliography; the statutes and rules are in Table J; the mortality figures are in the Tables with their query parameters.

A Note on Evidence. The book's own rules; the seven propositions, with their grades reserved for the last chapter.

Chapter One. The author's memory and his 1984 play; the 1980 United States Census counts for the county seats; the Flatwater Free Press investigation of January 2025; the Federal Register's December 2024 recorder rule; the current manner list in the state's 2021 manual.

Chapter Two. FARS and its documentation; the 1974 Nebraska testing act; section 23-1820; the 2021 manual's manner list; ANSI D16.1-2007 at its printed pages; the state vital-statistics path; ICD-9 and ICD-10 coding history; NVDRS; Norton's history of the accident word; the Associated Press's 2016 entry.

Chapter Three. The reconstruction profession's documents (Northwestern, from 1936; the accreditation from 1991); the era's testing mandate; Rosenberg's 1988 criteria at the page; Ovenstone's 1973 criteria as the review's tables carry them; the Swedish road criteria at Trafikverket's 2014 report's tables, with the screening-and-classification distinction.

Chapter Four. The statutes (23-1210, 23-1820, 23-1801, 23-1824, 44-502, 44-503); State ex rel. Crosby v. Moorhead (1916); LB 46 (1999) with its floor transcript; LB 671 and LR 276 (2009); LB 222 (1980) and LB 316 (1999) at their journals' chronologies; the 2006 amendment ordering guidelines on child autopsies; the

2011 child-death review report at pages 26 and 27; the National Research Council's 1928 bulletin, the National Academies' 2009 report by title, and the National Academies' 2025 medicolegal report with its Nebraska case study; the Omaha World-Herald's 2008 Fatal Flaws; the Flatwater Free Press, January 2025; Washington's 2021 statute and 2024 opinion.

Chapter Five. The parallel chronology: Porterfield (1960), Selzer and Payne (1962), the Los Angeles center's founding (1958), Macdonald (1964), Frank (1965), Tabachnick and colleagues (1966), Litman and Tabachnick with the Los Angeles group (1967), Hamburger (1969), Tabachnick's 1973 volume; the reviews' tables.

Chapter Six. Litman, Curphey, Shneidman, Farberow, and Tabachnick (1963), at its record; Shneidman's subintentioned death as a work; the reliability contest (Nelson and colleagues, 1978; Jobes and colleagues, mid-1980s) as works; the coroner's finding of August 1962 at one page without quotation.

Chapter Seven. Edland and Thorson's "Vehicular Suicide" (1970) at the page (pp. 42-45, with the discussion); Schmidt and colleagues (1972) at its record; Kunitz and Edland's 1973 opening as the publisher's page carries it; Whitt (2006) at the abstract; Timmermans (2005) at page 311; Tait and Carpenter (2013) at page 97; the medical examiners' guide (2002) at pages 5 and 8; Schmidt and colleagues (1977) at the abstract; Pokorny, Smith, and Finch (1972) as the review's table reports.

Chapter Eight. Phillips (1974, 1977, 1979); Bollen and Phillips (1981, 1982); the 1982 fictional-television study with its critics; Kessler and Stipp (1984); Baron and Reiss (1985) with reply and rejoinder; the Werther legend filed as legend; the World Health Organization's 2023 guidance; the 988 line's own press guidance.

Chapter Nine. Ovenstone (1973) at the review's width; Jenkins and Sainsbury (1980) and Tweedie's reply; Sainsbury and Jenkins (1982); Kuroda and Pounder (1994); Connolly, Cullen, and McTigue (1995); Peck and Warner (1995); the reviews (Routley 2003; Pompili 2012; Imants 2022; Radun 2024); Sweden's adopted criteria, at Trafikverket's 2014 report's tables, the 2014 and 2022 wordings kept apart.

Chapter Ten. Sweden's five-grade scale and its 2012 comparison (Andersson and Sokolowski, 2022, read in full); Finland's teams (Hernetkoski and Keskinen 1998; Öhberg, Penttilä, and Lönnqvist 1997; Radun and colleagues 2019); Australia (Law and colleagues 2024; Yelo and colleagues 2021); Norway (Breen and colleagues 2018); the United Kingdom (Harrison 2017 at page 29; Okolie and colleagues 2020); Ahlm's pre-reform figure at the review's width.

Chapter Eleven. The Burial of Suicide Act 1823 and the 1870 Act by their titles; MacDonald and Murphy's history cited to the work; the 1917 Code via commentary; canon 1184 of the 1983 Code at the Vatican's text; Duemling (1945) as dated background and never Nebraska practice; Ritter (1898), Jarman (1902, with the 1885 provision reproduced), Johnson (1920); sections 44-503(2) and 44-502(5); Double Indemnity (1936, 1943, 1944) with the inversion acknowledged; Hamburger (1969) and Norman and colleagues (2023) as beliefs held.

Chapter Twelve. Durkheim (1897) at standard scholarship; Hacking (1982, 1990); Douglas (1967); Atkinson (1978); Kunitz and Edland (1973); Ovenstone (1973); Rosenberg and colleagues (1988) at the page; the 2002 guide and the 2011 definitions at their pages; Sorenson, Shen, and Kraus (1997) by record; Pescosolido and Mendelsohn (1986); Klugman, Condran, and Wray (2013) at the abstract; Fernandez and Jayawardhana (2024)

at the abstract; Neeleman and Wessely (1997) by record; the undercount reviews (O'Carroll 1989; Jarvis 1991; Tøllefsen 2012; Bakst 2016; Rockett from 2010); Phillips and Ruth (1993).

Chapter Thirteen. NHTSA's 2024 alcohol-impaired edition read whole; the article's 1982 figure as the article's; the AAA Foundation's 2018 study and 2024 brief at their pages; Rockett (2018) at its width; Schmidt and colleagues (1977) at the abstract and (1972) at the record.

Chapter Fourteen. The 1982 state booklet from the author's copy; the 1983 edition, located in the state documents archive in October 2026; the Department of Transportation's historical table; the 2024 review's Table 2 at the page; the CDC WONDER queries of September 30, 2026; Murray and de Leo (2007) named as what it is.

Chapter Fifteen. The 2002 guide at pages 5 and 8; Edland's practice rule at second hand and labeled; Atkinson and Timmermans; the Queensland open cases; NVDRS's three sources; Andersson and Sokolowski's inference as theirs.

Chapter Sixteen. Brunvand (1981) cited to the book; Ralph and colleagues (2019) and Goddard and colleagues (2019) at their records; the Associated Press's 2016 entry; the author's reading of the era's weeklies, labeled.

Chapter Seventeen. 49 CFR Part 563 and its rules (2006; December 18, 2024; November 28, 2025; May 18, 2026); the March 17, 2022 coverage notice; the Driver Privacy Act of 2015; Executive Order 14192; the printed null search.

Chapter Eighteen. The Tables' whole apparatus; the Flatwater Free Press's January 2025 investigation; LR 276's Appendix D; the 2021 manual; the state program's 2026 newsletter; the type-level studies; Rockett and Tøllefsen for the overdose paragraph; the decision tree printed before the numbers existed, printed

here.

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Acknowledgments

No interviews were held for this book, so no person's confidence is owed here, and the debts are all public. They are owed to the people and institutions that kept the record open.

To the librarians and archivists whose work is invisible until it answers. To HathiTrust, whose full-view scan let a fifty-six-year-old conference volume be read at the page. To the Government Printing Office and the Federal Register, whose pages are dated like the documents they hold. To the National Center for Health Statistics and the CDC WONDER team, who built a public window onto the nation's death ledger and labeled its suppressions honestly. To the Nebraska Legislature, whose bills, floor transcripts, and interim studies are online for any citizen. To the Nebraska Department of Transportation, which keeps a fatality table back to 1936. And to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' violent-death program, which counts what the counties cannot.

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To the researchers whose papers are this book's spine: the Los Angeles center's founders, who built a way to ask the dead's intent; J. F. Edland, who wrote down what his own office did; the Finnish investigators who drove to the scenes for sixty years; Sweden's transport agency and its researchers, who built the five grades and then printed the before and after; and the authors of the 2024 review, whose tables let a small question be

seen whole. Where this book disagrees with their findings' edges, the edges are theirs and the disagreement is the book's, labeled.

And to the trooper, unnamed because his name is forgotten, who stood in the ditches of the interstate for twenty years and counted what the county would not, and who carried the count for all twenty of them and said it once, to a boy writing a play. The book is the answer his claim deserved: tested against everything the record holds, and left standing where the record runs out.

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Questions for Discussion

For book clubs, classrooms, and the reader alone at the end. The questions are about the book's systems and its ethics, which is where its argument lives.

1. The book's first witness is a man whose claim could not be tested, and the book tests it anyway. What makes a claim worth testing when the test cannot settle it? Where does the book's answer, corroborated in kind and unmeasurable in proportion, leave your own trust in testimony?

2. The trooper's word was "usually," and the thirteenth chapter prices it against the federal table, and the author retires it in the eighteenth. What did the concession change about the book's credibility? What would the book have lost by keeping the word?

3. The manner box had six values, and one of them was "could not be determined," and a county attorney said he did not think he had ever checked it. Is an unused honest option better than none, and what would make an office use it?

4. The book's thesis is that mercy makes uncertainty look settled, in either direction. Where in your own work does kindness wear the costume of certainty?

5. Chapter Fourteen runs a sensitivity exercise and refuses an estimate: about four, if, printed beside a certified zero, never subtracted. Did the refusal frustrate you or persuade you, and what does the difference between a what-if and an estimate mean for the numbers you meet elsewhere?

6. The fifteenth chapter weighs the two errors as costs: suspicion's error bills a family by name, and mercy's error bills the systems that count. Which column would you weigh heavier, and what does your answer say about which harms a community can see?

7. The county attorney was coroner because the Legislature folded the offices in 1915, for the reason the 2025 investigation reports, and the arrangement stands. Where else does a cost-saving design from a century ago still decide how your community's hardest questions get answered?

8. The car now testifies: five seconds of memory in nearly every new car, owned by the dead driver's estate, unread by any certifier the book could find. Should the certifier's office be required to ask the car? What would you want, if the dead driver were yours?

9. Sweden looked, and its count moved, almost entirely out of the undetermined grade. Nebraska's ledger reads low and silent. What would it take for your own state to look, and who would have to send the looker?

10. The formula "driver lost control" asserted nothing about intent and said nothing false about the wreck, and it settled everything. What formulas close the questions in the papers you read now?

11. The author is a witness in his own book, and the book's rules treat his memory as testimony, not as ground truth. When has your own memory of a conversation had to carry more than memory can?

12. The verdict sentence is: undetermined cannot fix the count, and it keeps the count from claiming what it does not know. The book asks the machinery for exactly one change. Is the smallest reform the right size, and what larger one would you argue for?

If these questions raise more than they settle, or if you are reading this book during a hard season: for support in the United States, call or text 988.

Select Bibliography

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About the Author

David Boles is an author, dramatist, editor, publisher, and teacher, writing and publishing since 1975. He grew up in Nebraska, under the sky this book is about, and in the fall of 1983 he spent an afternoon interviewing a Nebraska state trooper for a play, and one aside in that interview outlasted everything else in it. His play *Murder in Ernest* was copyrighted in 1984, and its machinery, a coroner who must mistake one death for another, came out of that afternoon. He holds an MFA from Columbia University and publishes the long-running BolesBlogs. His recent solo work is cultural criticism and systems theory. *The Count Is the Mercy* is his record of the conversation, tested against everything the public record holds.

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The One-Way Drop: Zero Tolerance and the Rules We Write for Other People. Contamination arithmetic from a Philadelphia laboratory to the law's own thresholds. The kin here is the threshold: the line drawn at 0.08, at two years, at nine deaths, and what the line's price is.

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