

# INTRODUCTION The Passive Voice “Has also been associated...”

In a virtual hearing conducted amid a pandemic, politicians interrogate three witnesses regarding the ongoing crisis. The Chairwoman initiates by demanding an apology from Witness #1, who appears flustered and confronts the pain experienced by the American public. Despite her anger about the law-breaking conduct of others, she fails to accept her personal involvement in the crisis, insisting that her past behavior was justified based on the information she had at the time.

Witness #2, her well-groomed cousin, echoes her sentiments but similarly evades full responsibility. The witnesses seem coached in maintaining a shield of self-preservation, showcasing an apparent denial of culpability for the epidemic. A compelling moment occurs when a Politician directly questions Witness #3 about corporate accountability, revealing a troubling pattern: executives from the implicated company have not faced criminal charges for their corporate actions.

The Politicians stress the need for accountability not just from these witnesses but also from the government, implying negligence in its regulatory duties. Witness #2 admits a moral responsibility for the crisis but uses "the passive voice" to absolve his family from blame, further implying ignorance about the repercussions of their product. This language choice illustrates a reluctance to confront the gravity of their involvement in the epidemic, igniting concern from the politicians present.

The narrative then transitions to a broader reflection drawn from the author's own work in *\*The Tipping Point,\** exploring how tiny shifts can lead to large-scale societal changes. The author aims to conduct a forensic investigation of social epidemics, examining scenarios where individuals' choices—deliberate or inadvertent—significantly altered the trajectory of contagions. These cases journey through various settings and highlight the duality of tools used for societal improvement being susceptible to misuse.

The concluding remarks emphasize the necessity of grappling with the realities of epidemics, encouraging a frank conversation about accountability and the societal structures that enable or exacerbate crises. As the investigation unfolds, the focus shifts toward understanding the dynamics that can either foster or hinder positive social change, setting the stage for deeper inquiries into the witness's narratives and the implications of their actions.