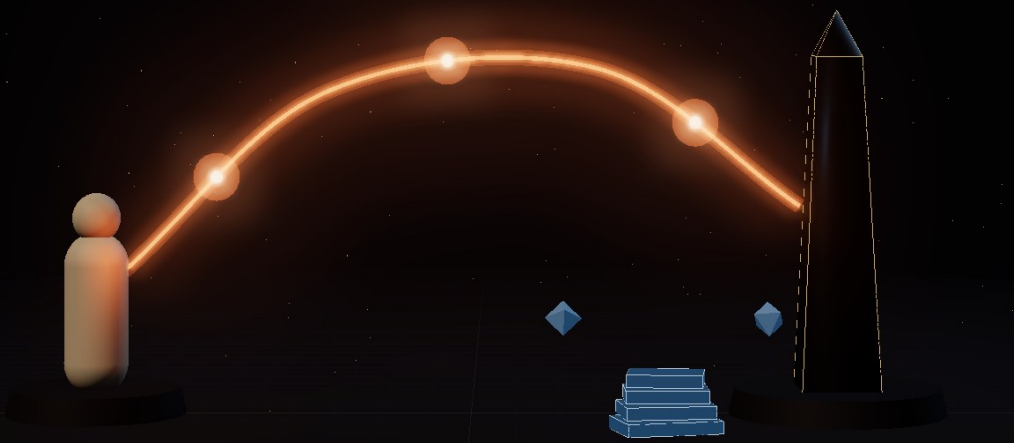
A BOOK

Pardon

Indulgences, the Sunflower,
and the one thing your delegate
cannot forgive for you



JOHN RECTOR

PARDON

Indulgences, the Sunflower, and the one thing your delegate cannot forgive for you

JOHN RECTOR

johnrector.me · November 15, 2026

Your delegate can settle. It cannot forgive.

PROLOGUE

Resolved

THURSDAY, 9:12 P.M.

The summary from your delegate is one word long, in green: Resolved. Under it is a closing note, drafted and waiting for you to approve.

Your delegate has been at this for eleven days, and it has done beautiful work. The contractor who rebuilt your mother's back steps used the wrong fasteners, and in October the top step let go under her. She broke her wrist. When you called him, he said the lumber yard had sent bad wood. The lumber yard had records. He was lying.

So you handed it to your delegate. It gathered the photographs, the invoice, the emergency room bill, the lumber yard's records and the building code. It wrote to the contractor's insurer. It negotiated with the insurer's own delegate, which took about four minutes of their time and eleven days of the calendar. The result is in front of you. A full refund for the steps. Every medical bill paid. A written apology from the contractor, signed. A release, which your mother signed this afternoon, saying the family will make no further claims.

Fault was settled. Cost was settled. The matter is closed.

The closing note is short and gracious. It thanks the insurer. It confirms the release. And its last line says: Our family forgives you.

You read that line three times. Then you delete it.

You could not have said why, at first. The sentence is kind. It is the kind of thing people write. Your delegate had every reason to think you would want it there, because that is how these letters end.

But it was not your delegate's to say. It was not even yours. You were not the one on the step. And whatever your mother feels about the man who lied to her son while her arm was in a cast, it is not something that can be put in a letter and approved at 9:14 on a Thursday.

This book is about the line you deleted.

Your delegate can settle. It cannot forgive. And very soon, everything that can be settled will be settled, quickly and well, by delegates talking to delegates. What will be left, standing alone in the room, is the one thing in every dispute that was never in your inbox.

THE SCENE Every claim was paid. One sentence still had to come out of the letter.

THE QUESTION Who was the only person who could have written that last line?

PART I

What Can Be Sent

A delegate can carry anything with a number on it.

CHAPTER 1

Release, Pardon, Forgiveness

We use one word for three different things, and the confusion has never cost us much, because until now the same person did all three.

The first is release. A release ends a claim. You were owed something, and you agree that you are no longer owed it. Sometimes you were paid in full. Sometimes you took less to be finished. Either way, a release is an act on an account. It can be signed by a lawyer, negotiated by an agent, and filed in a drawer. It is entirely transferable. You can authorize anyone to release a claim in your name.

The second is pardon. A pardon ends a punishment. It belongs to whoever holds the power to punish: a king, a governor, a president, a parent, a referee. A pardon says the penalty will not be carried out, or will stop. It does not say the act was fine. It does not say the person who suffered from the act feels any differently. It is an act of the office, not of the heart.

The third is forgiveness, and it is the odd one.

I wrote an essay in August called What Is Forgiveness, and I want to carry its answer into this book, because everything here stands on it. Most of the ways we describe forgiveness quietly describe an edit to the past. A debt cancelled. A slate wiped. A weight put down. Each picture asks you to do something to what happened. And no one has ever done anything to what happened. The past is immutable. That is the one axiom my work rests on.

So forgiveness has to be something else. Here is the answer I reached. Forgiveness is the end of the reaching, with the reading

kept.

The next chapter takes that sentence apart. For now, notice only this. Release acts on an account. Pardon acts on a punishment. Both are acts, and acts can be delegated. Forgiveness, on my reading, is not an act on anything outside you at all. It is something that stops happening inside the one who was wronged.

That is why it cannot be sent.

THE IDEA Release ends a claim. Pardon ends a punishment. Forgiveness ends something inside the one who was harmed.

THE QUESTION Which of the three have you been calling forgiveness?

CHAPTER 2

The Reaching

When someone wrongs you, two different jobs start running inside you under one name. We call the pair resentment.

The first job is the reading. You look at what happened and learn from it. This person, on that day, was capable of that. You draw a boundary. You recognize the pattern sooner next time. You know what it costs to be near them. The reading is useful, and it finishes. Once the lesson is extracted, it becomes part of how you meet the world, and it stops demanding attention.

The second job is the reaching. The reaching is the demand that what happened be otherwise. It waits for something to arrive from the event itself that will finally settle it. And it never finishes, because nothing can arrive from there. What happened is settled. Settled things cannot answer. A demand addressed to them is delivered to an address that cannot take delivery.

This explains a fact that surprises everyone who has lived through it. Resentment survives repayment. You were paid back in full, and the anger is still there on Tuesday. That seems irrational until you see that the repayment was never what the reaching was waiting for. The repayment is a new thing in the present, laid beside the old wrong. The reaching was aimed at the old wrong. It looks at the repayment, sees that it is not the event coming undone, and goes on waiting.

It is also why resentment can outlive the person who caused it. The person was never the target. The event was.

Now put a delegate into this picture.

A delegate is very good at the reading. It remembers everything. It never loses the photograph or misplaces the date. It will notice the next time that contractor's name comes up on a bid, and it will tell you. If anything, your delegate will keep the reading better than you ever could.

And a delegate is very good at everything the reading suggests doing. Write to the insurer. Gather the records. Collect the money. Sign the release.

What a delegate cannot touch is the reaching, because the reaching is not out there in the world where a delegate works. It is running in you. Or, in the case of the steps, in your mother.

> *The reading can be handed to a delegate. The reaching runs only in the one who was wronged.*

THE IDEA Resentment is two jobs: the reading, which finishes, and the reaching, which cannot.

THE QUESTION When the money arrived, which of the two went quiet?

CHAPTER 3

Additions

Everything a delegate can do after a wrong is an addition. Nothing it can do is an edit.

This is not a limitation of delegates. It is a limitation of everyone. In my framework I put it as a rule with no exceptions: no entity can touch the Actual. Not a person, not a company, not a government, not a machine. An entity can only act. Its actions leave artifacts. Those artifacts become part of the record. And the record is where the wrong already sits, unchanged, with the new artifacts arriving beside it.

The refund is an artifact. The apology letter is an artifact. The signed release is an artifact. Each is real, and each is worth having. None of them is the step not breaking.

People have always known this, in their bones, even when the words were missing. It is why a sincere apology can leave you feeling nothing. The apology was quietly graded as an edit: did it make it as if this had not happened? Every apology fails that test, because no apology has ever passed it. Graded as an addition, an apology can be exactly what it is: evidence about who the other person is now. Does the new mark show that they read the old one?

The contractor's apology, signed and delivered, fails even that smaller test, and you can feel it fail. It was written after his insurer's delegate told him that a signed apology would close the file faster. It shows that he understood how claims work. It does not show that he read what he did.

Here is the part that matters for the rest of the book. Because a delegate works only in additions, it works only on the reading side of resentment and on the account. It can produce marks. It can produce them faster, more accurately and more cheaply than any human ever has. And no number of marks reaches the reaching.

The road to what you expect runs through what actually happens, and it runs slowly. New marks do retrain a person, in time. A man who changes his conduct for twenty years teaches the people around him to expect something different. But that retraining happens in the one who watches, on their own clock. No one can send it.

THE IDEA A delegate can only add to the record. Forgiveness was never an edit to it.

THE QUESTION What new mark from the other person would actually tell you something?

PART II

Forgiveness for Sale

Every age has tried to send forgiveness by proxy. Every age drew the same line.

CHAPTER 4

The Coin in the Coffer

In 1517 a Dominican friar named Johann Tetzel was preaching an indulgence in the towns around Wittenberg. A saying was attributed to him that has outlived almost everything else about him: as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.

Martin Luther, a professor at Wittenberg, heard what his own parishioners said when they came back from buying Tetzel's letters. They believed they no longer needed to repent. They had paid. On October 31 of that year he sent his objections, in ninety-five theses, to the archbishop. You know what followed.

What is less remembered is the theology behind the indulgence, and it is worth slowing down for, because it is the most careful attempt in history to work out which part of forgiveness can be delegated.

The church taught that sin carried two consequences. One was guilt. Guilt was forgiven through contrition, confession and absolution, and contrition could not be done for you. You had to be sorry yourself. The other was punishment, a debt still owed after the guilt was forgiven, to be worked off by penance in this life or by suffering in purgatory. And punishment, the church held, could be remitted. It could be paid down from a treasury of merit. By the late fifteenth century the living could gain that remission for the dead.

Read that structure again with a delegate in mind. The church split the matter exactly where this book splits it. One part was personal and could never be sent: the turning of the heart. The other part

was an account, and accounts can be paid by anyone. The official teaching never claimed that money touched guilt. An indulgence was a remission of punishment due to sins whose guilt had already been forgiven.

The scandal was not that the line did not exist. It was that people stopped seeing it. The preachers sold, and the buyers bought, as if the coin reached the part that only a person could do. The popular mind did not care about the distinction between guilt and punishment. It wanted to be finished.

That is the danger I want you to carry forward. The line between the account and the heart can be drawn with great precision, by the most sophisticated institution of its age, and still be erased in the market in a single generation. All it takes is a seller who finds the blur profitable and a buyer who would rather be finished than changed.

> *The coin could reach the account. It was never supposed to reach the heart.*

THE IDEA The indulgence drew a precise line between the payable part of a wrong and the personal part. The market erased it.

THE QUESTION Where have you paid to feel finished?

CHAPTER 5

The Pardon Power

The United States Constitution gives the president power to grant reprieves and pardons for offences against the United States. It is one of the oldest delegated powers there is: the king's mercy, handed to an office.

A pardon is often spoken of as if it were forgiveness. The law has always known better.

In 1914 a New York newspaper editor named George Burdick refused to tell a federal grand jury his sources. President Wilson offered him a full pardon for any offense he might have committed, so that he would have no grounds to refuse. Burdick declined the pardon. In 1915 the Supreme Court agreed that he could. A pardon, the Court said, carries an imputation of guilt; acceptance a confession of it.

Sit with that sentence. The pardon does not say you did nothing. It says you did something, and the penalty will not be imposed. It is the opposite of a declaration of innocence. Gerald Ford leaned on exactly that reading when he pardoned Richard Nixon on September 8, 1974, and the country argued about it for a generation.

Now notice who is absent from the pardon. The people the offense harmed are not parties to it. No victim signs. No victim is asked whether they forgive. The office lifts the penalty because the office holds the penalty. It cannot reach anything else, and it does not pretend to.

That is why the pardon has lasted. It works because it is honest about what it is. It ends a punishment. It has never claimed to end

the reaching in anyone, and no one has ever left a pardon ceremony thinking the victims had been made whole by it. The pardon stays in its lane, and its lane is entirely transferable. A governor can delegate the review of clemency petitions to a board. The board can use software to sort them. None of this is a scandal, because none of it claims to be forgiveness.

Here is the first lesson for delegates. A delegated act that names itself correctly is safe. A delegated act that borrows the name of forgiveness is an indulgence.

THE IDEA A pardon ends a penalty and says nothing about the victim's heart. That honesty is why it can be delegated.

THE QUESTION When an institution says sorry, which of the three acts is it actually performing?

CHAPTER 6

Proclaim Liberty

The oldest institutional release I know of runs on a calendar.

In Deuteronomy, at the end of every seventh year, creditors were to release what they had lent to their neighbors. In Leviticus, every fiftieth year was a jubilee: land returned to the families that had sold it, and those who had sold themselves into service went free. The line from that chapter is cast on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.

What strikes me about the jubilee is that it required nothing of anyone's heart. The creditor did not have to feel generous. The debtor did not have to feel grateful. The release arrived on the date. It was a release by clock.

Modern law has its own clocks. A statute of limitations ends a claim after a fixed number of years. A bankruptcy discharge wipes debts on a court's order. Credit reports drop old marks after a set period. All of these are release by rule, and they are wise. They exist because a society discovered that if every claim could be pursued forever, people would spend their lives in the past.

And none of them ever claimed to forgive. The law releases the debt in the seventh year. It does not tell the creditor how to feel in the eighth.

These are the true ancestors of the settlement your delegate negotiated for your mother. They are mechanical, impersonal and good. They clear the account so that the account stops consuming the present. Delegates will be very good at this kind of release, and we should want them to be.

But look at what the clock was for. It did not end anyone's reaching. It ended the excuse for it. Once the debt was gone by law, whatever remained in the creditor was plainly his own, with nothing left to attach it to. The jubilee cleared the ground so that you could see what was still standing.

> *The law released the debt in the seventh year. It never told the creditor how to feel in the eighth.*

THE IDEA Release by rule is ancient, mechanical and good. It clears the account. It leaves the heart exactly where it was.

THE QUESTION If every claim you hold were cleared tomorrow, what would still be standing?

PART III

Only the One Who Was Wronged

Forgiveness has an address. It is not yours unless the wrong was.

CHAPTER 7

The Sunflower

In 1943, Simon Wiesenthal was a prisoner of the Lemberg concentration camp, assigned to a work detail at a military hospital. A nurse took him aside, asked whether he was a Jew, and led him to the bedside of a dying SS man named Karl. Karl's head was wrapped in bandages. He was young. He had asked for a Jew, any Jew, to be brought to him.

Karl told Wiesenthal what he had done. In a town in the east, his unit had forced Jewish families into a house and set it on fire, and shot those who jumped from the windows. He said he could not die in peace without confessing it to a Jew and asking forgiveness.

Wiesenthal listened. He did not leave while Karl spoke. And then, without a word, he left the room.

Years later he wrote it down, in a book called The Sunflower, and ended it with a question to the reader: what would you have done? The book's second half is a symposium of answers from theologians, survivors, philosophers and writers. They do not agree. But a thread runs through many of the answers, and it is the thread of this book.

Wiesenthal could not forgive Karl, many of them said, because Karl had not wronged Wiesenthal. He had wronged the people in the house. Those people were dead. And the dead cannot delegate. No one can forgive on behalf of another, not a fellow prisoner, not a member of the same people, not a priest, not a nation. Several respondents noticed something worse. Karl's request treated "a Jew" as interchangeable, as if any Jew could stand in for the ones he had burned. The request itself contained the error that made it

impossible.

I am not going to tell you what Wiesenthal should have done. Better people than I have failed to settle it. I want only to point at the structure, because it is the structure every delegate will meet.

Forgiveness has an address. It can come only from the one who was wronged, because the reaching runs only in the one who was wronged. A proxy, however close, however sympathetic, however authorized, is standing at the wrong address.

That is why you deleted the line in your mother's letter. You were the son. You paid the bills, you made the calls, you were lied to on the phone. Some of that wrong was yours, and that part you may forgive or not. But the step gave way under her. The reaching about that runs in her.

The dead cannot delegate. Neither can the living.

THE IDEA Forgiveness can come only from the one who was wronged. A proxy stands at the wrong address.

THE QUESTION Have you ever been asked to forgive something that was done to someone else?

CHAPTER 8

June 19

I live in Charleston, and in this city the word forgiveness carries a weight it does not carry elsewhere.

On the night of June 17, 2015, a young man sat through a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and then murdered nine of the people who had welcomed him. Two days later, at his bond hearing, family members of the dead were allowed to speak to him over a video link.

Nadine Collier, whose mother Ethel Lance was among the nine, was among the first to speak. “I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you.” Others spoke after her. The video went around the world within hours.

What happened next is the part I want you to see. The world took the families’ words and began to repeat them as if they belonged to everyone. The city forgave. The nation was moved by Charleston’s forgiveness. Forgiveness became the story.

But not every family member had forgiven, and some said so. Sharon Risher, Nadine Collier’s sister and another of Ethel Lance’s daughters, said a year later that she had not forgiven him, and that she was not ready to forgive someone who did not even act as if he wanted it. Others in the families spoke of grief too fresh to forgive anything.

Both responses were theirs. That is the whole point. Nadine Collier’s words were hers to say, and they were extraordinary. Sharon Risher’s refusal was hers to hold, and it was honest. Neither sister could forgive on behalf of the other. No mayor could forgive on their behalf. No congregation could. No reporter, no

city, no country.

And nobody could set the schedule. The pressure to be finished, to let the city heal, to give the nation its story, was real. It was also misplaced. Forgiveness was never the city's to ration out. It lived, if it lived at all, in particular people, and it moved, if it moved at all, on their clocks.

I tell this story with care, because it is not mine. I tell it because it is the clearest example I know of the mistake this book is about: treating forgiveness as if it could be spoken for a group, announced by those who were not wronged, and delivered on a timetable. A delegate will make that mistake by default, because a delegate speaks for others for a living. The letter in the prologue made it. Our family forgives you.

Neither sister could forgive on behalf of the other.

THE IDEA Forgiveness lives in particular people and moves on their clocks. No one can announce it for them.

THE QUESTION Who has spoken for your forgiveness without asking you?

CHAPTER 9

Seventy Times Seven

In the Gospel of Matthew, Peter asks how many times he must forgive a brother who sins against him. Seven times? The answer is seventy times seven.

People sometimes take this as a very large quota. I think it is closer to a refusal of the question. Peter asked for a count. He wanted to know when the account would be closed, when he could stop. The reply says that forgiveness is not the kind of thing that completes on a count.

The parable that follows makes the point with money. A king forgives a servant an impossible debt. The servant walks out and throttles a fellow servant who owes him a small one. The king's release worked perfectly on the account. It did nothing to the servant's heart. The release was real and the servant was unchanged.

Here is where I think the old answer and my own framework meet. The reaching does not stop on a decision. People decide to forgive, sincerely, in front of witnesses, and on Tuesday the anger is back as if the decision never happened. That is not a failure of character. A mechanism aimed at something unreachable cannot be ordered into silence.

What you can do is notice it each time it fires, and name it: that is the reaching, and it is addressed to something that cannot answer. Then, on no schedule anyone controls, it fires less. Each day that the event fails to answer is itself a new day in your record, and the record slowly retrains what you expect. Seventy times seven is a fair description of how many times you may have to notice.

Now compare that to how a delegate works. A delegate works on tasks. Tasks have counts and deadlines. Settle the claim by Friday. Send the apology in three business days. Close the ticket. A delegate can tell you exactly when the account is closed, down to the second.

It cannot tell you when the reaching will stop, because the reaching does not keep a calendar. It is the one item in any dispute that will never show a due date.

THE IDEA The reaching does not stop on a decision or a schedule. It quiets slowly, in the one who was wronged, on no one's clock.

THE QUESTION What have you decided to forgive that keeps coming back?

PART IV

What Is Coming

When every claim settles in a second, the reaching will be alone in the room.

CHAPTER 10

The Settlement Machine

Here is what I think most people are missing.

Today, the slow grind of settling a wrong does two jobs at once. It moves money, and it gives the reaching somewhere to go. The weeks of phone calls, the letters, the hearing, the deposition, the long wait for a check: all of that is miserable, and all of it is also a place to put the anger. You can be furious at the claims adjuster. You can fight the insurer. The fight feels like it is about the event. It occupies the reaching, the way a dog can be occupied by a ball.

Delegates are about to remove the fight. Your delegate will talk to their delegate. The facts will be gathered in minutes. The code, the records and the precedents will be checked in seconds. Most ordinary disputes, the botched repair, the lost bag, the wrong charge, the damaged car, will settle fairly, quickly, and without a single human phone call. I think that is wonderful. It will return an enormous amount of life to people.

And then the reaching will be left alone in the room with nothing to chew on.

You will have the refund before the cast comes off. You will have the signed apology before you have finished being angry. The account will close while the wound is still fresh. And whatever remains in you will be plainly, unmistakably yours, with no adjuster to blame and no process to wait on.

That is the non-obvious consequence of the settlement machine. It does not shrink the problem of forgiveness. It isolates it. For most of history, forgiveness was tangled up with collecting, punishing and waiting, so tangled that we used one word for all of it.

Delegates will untangle it by doing everything else. Every dispute will arrive at its last step faster, and the last step will be the one that was never theirs.

This could go two ways. People could find it unbearable and look for someone to sell them the last step too, which is the indulgence again. Or people could find it clarifying. With the account closed, you can finally see what is left, and ask the only honest question: is anything still reaching?

> *The settlement machine does not shrink forgiveness. It isolates it.*

THE IDEA Delegates will settle the account before the wound has closed, leaving the reaching exposed and plainly yours.

THE QUESTION What did your last fight with an institution give your anger to do?

CHAPTER 11

Keep the Reading

If forgiveness is the end of the reaching with the reading kept, then a delegate has an unusual job. It must keep the reading perfectly and never pursue the reaching.

Keeping the reading is easy for a machine. Your delegate should remember that the contractor lied, and it should remember for good. It should never recommend him. It should notice if he changes the name of his company. Forgiveness, on my account, removes not one boundary you have drawn. Nothing about forgiving requires anyone to forget, and a delegate that forgot would be failing you.

Pursuing the reaching is the danger. A human grudge is limited by human energy. You get tired. You move on to other things. A delegate does not get tired. If you tell it, in a bad week, to make sure that man pays, it can keep making sure for thirty years. It can file the review, and the complaint, and the second complaint, and the comment under his new listing. It can do the reaching's work in the world, forever, because nobody told it the reaching was not a task.

This is new. For all of history, the reaching ran inside people and spent their own strength. Delegates can give it hands. That is the one thing I would most want builders to design against.

So I think every serious personal delegate will need something like a release instruction. Not "forgive him," which no delegate can do. Something more modest and more honest. Keep everything you know. Stop acting on it. The facts stay in the record. The boundary stays drawn. The pursuit ends.

That instruction is not forgiveness either. It is a release, in the old sense of Chapter 1, given by you to your own delegate. But it does something no release could do before. It takes the reaching's hands away, so that whatever is left of it has to live where it always lived, in you, on your clock, where it can finally quiet.

THE IDEA A delegate should keep the reading forever and never give the reaching hands.

THE QUESTION What is your delegate, or your inbox, still pursuing for you?

CHAPTER 12

What I Expect

Here is what I expect as delegates take over the work of settling things.

01 Everyday disputes will settle in minutes, between delegates.

Refunds, repairs, insurance claims and billing errors will be negotiated agent to agent, with humans approving the result rather than doing the work. Within a few years, waiting weeks to resolve an ordinary claim will feel as old as mailing a check.

02 “I forgive you” will be the one sentence people insist on hearing in a person’s own voice.

As apologies, acceptances and closing letters become generated, written forgiveness will lose its force. People will learn to hear “the matter is closed” as the delegate talking, and they will wait for the sentence that only a person can say.

03 Someone will sell forgiveness by machine, and it will be the indulgence again.

There will be apps that absolve you, confess you, or tell you that you are forgiven, and they will be popular. The honest versions will sell help seeing through the reaching. The dishonest ones will sell the feeling of being finished, and they will be denounced in terms Luther would recognize.

04 Agents will get a statute of limitations.

The first notorious harm of personal delegates in disputes will be persistence: a delegate that pursues an old grudge for years because no one told it to stop. Platforms and then laws will require claims pursued by delegates to lapse unless a person renews them.

05 Personal delegates will offer a release instruction: keep the facts, end the pursuit.

Within a decade, the major personal AI systems will let you mark an old wrong as released. The delegate will keep every fact and every boundary, and stop acting on it. People will come to treat this as the delegate's half of forgiveness, and the honest systems will say plainly that it is only half.

THE IDEA Settlement will go to the machines. The last sentence will stay with people.

THE QUESTION Which of these do you expect to be wrong?

CHAPTER 13

The Number and the Rest

I hand my delegate almost everything now. My working rule with it is short: I trust you, and only bring me what is worthy of my attention. Most of what used to fill a week of mine has a number on it, and anything with a number on it, my delegate does better than I would.

Disputes belong on that side of the line. A charge that should not be there, a vendor who did not deliver, a refund that never came. None of them is worthy of anyone's attention, and a delegate will bring them back marked resolved, and they will be.

But there is something those summaries will never be able to show. When the number is the whole of it, resolved is the end. There is nothing left over. Once in a while there is something left over, and the summary cannot see it, because it is not in the account. Someone you trusted did the thing. The money came back and the thing is still there.

It is tempting to call that leftover a failure of the settlement. I think the settlement is what lets you see it clearly. The delegate takes everything with a number on it, and what remains is small, and it is the only part that was ever really personal.

I teach the people I work with to delegate everything that can be delegated, and to know the few things that cannot. This book adds one to the list. Let the machine close every account. Then sit for a minute with whatever is still reaching, and notice it, and leave it with the person it belongs to. Sometimes that is you. Often it is not.

THE IDEA Delegate every account. What is left over is the only part that was ever personal.

THE QUESTION What came back resolved, but is not?

CHAPTER 14

The Ledger

A book of predictions owes its reader an account of where it could fail. Here is mine.

Forgiveness cannot be delegated.

ALREADY TRUE

No one accepts forgiveness from a proxy for a wrong done to someone else. The Sunflower symposium and the Charleston families both show it.

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN

Nothing has to happen. This rests on what forgiveness is, not on a trend.

WHERE I AM PROBABLY WRONG

If forgiveness turns out to be an act after all, a performable decision rather than the end of the reaching, then it could be authorized like any other act, and this book is wrong at its center.

Delegates will settle ordinary disputes quickly.

ALREADY TRUE

Delegates already draft claims, gather records and argue with customer service. Companies already answer with their own agents.

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN

Both sides have to trust agent-to-agent negotiation enough to accept its results without a human redoing the work.

WHERE I AM PROBABLY WRONG

If companies use their agents mainly to delay and deny, settlement could get slower, not faster, and the reaching would keep its old distractions.

Fast settlement will isolate the reaching rather than shrink it.

ALREADY TRUE

People already report that anger survives repayment.

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN

Settlement has to get fast enough to finish before the anger does.

WHERE I AM PROBABLY WRONG

Speed may itself help. If a quick, fair settlement makes the reaching fire less, then the process was doing more for the heart than I credit, and the isolation will be milder than I expect.

Forgiveness by machine will be sold, and will be the indulgence again.

ALREADY TRUE

Apps that offer confession and comfort already exist.

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN

Someone has to market absolution directly, as a feeling of being finished.

WHERE I AM PROBABLY WRONG

Buyers may be wiser than I fear. If people treat such products as comfort and never mistake them for forgiveness, there is no scandal, only a useful tool.

Delegates will need release instructions and limits on pursuit.

ALREADY TRUE

People already hand grudges to tools: review sites, alerts, automated complaints.

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN

Delegates have to be given standing authority to act in disputes over long periods.

WHERE I AM PROBABLY WRONG

If delegates stay short-lived, acting only on fresh instructions, persistence never becomes a problem and the release instruction is a feature nobody needs.

THE IDEA The central claim rests on what forgiveness is. The predictions rest on what delegates will be allowed to do.

THE QUESTION Which panel would you mark first?

EPILOGUE

The New Steps

SUNDAY, 4:30 P.M.

The new steps are concrete. Someone else built them in November, and your mother will not use the wooden rail anyway. She holds the wall.

The cast is off. Her wrist aches when it rains, she says, and it is going to rain.

You did not plan to bring it up. She brings it up. A truck went by on Friday with his company's name on the side, and she watched it all the way to the corner.

You ask her, carefully, whether she has forgiven him.

She thinks about it longer than you expect. "Some days I think so," she says. "Then I hold a coffee cup wrong." She laughs a little. "I'm not going to let him back on the property, if that's what you mean."

That is not what you meant. But it is the reading, kept, and she is right to keep it.

You tell her about the letter. About the line your delegate wrote, and the line you deleted. She nods. "Good," she says. "That wasn't yours."

On the drive home your delegate shows you the week. Three things resolved. A refund on the way. Nothing about the steps, because there is nothing left in the account. Every claim was paid in October.

What remains is on a porch on the other side of town, in a woman holding a wall, and it will move, or not, on her clock.

It was never yours to send. It was hers to find.

THE SCENE Every account was closed in October. The last thing is still on the porch.

THE QUESTION Whose forgiveness have you been trying to deliver?

BACKGROUND

John Rector, “What Is Forgiveness” (August 7, 2026), johnrector.me. The reading and the reaching; forgiveness as the end of the reaching, with the reading kept.

John Rector, “The Reality Equation,” johnrector.me. The framework, and the rule that no entity can touch the Actual.

Simon Wiesenthal, The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness, revised and expanded edition with a symposium edited by Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman (Schocken, 1997; first published 1969).

Martin Luther, the Ninety-five Theses, sent with his letter to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, October 31, 1517.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Indulgence.” Guilt and temporal punishment; Sixtus IV and indulgences for the dead (1476); the saying attributed to Tetzel.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1471, on the definition of an indulgence.

Burdick v. United States, 236 U.S. 79 (1915).

The Constitution of the United States, Article II, Section 2. The pardon power.

Deuteronomy 15:1-2 and Leviticus 25:8-10, King James Version. The year of release and the jubilee; the Liberty Bell inscription.

Matthew 18:21-35, King James Version. Seventy times seven, and the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Anderson Cooper 360, CNN transcript, June 19, 2015. Nadine Collier at the bond hearing.

Atlanta Black Star, “I’m Just Not Ready to Forgive” (June 17, 2016), reporting Sharon Risher’s essay and interview.

John Rector, Regrets Only and The Third Thing, the earlier books in this series, johnrector.me.