FORGIVENESS AND THE WEIGHT YOU CARRY

A Quiet Journey Toward Peace

G.G. Muse

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Author: G.G. Muse

There is a world elsewhere

For everyone still carrying something
they were never meant to carry alone

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Introduction :
You know the feeling.

It is there before you even open your eyes in the morning. That half-second of peace right after waking — and then it arrives. The thought. The memory. The face. The thing that was said, the thing that was done, the thing that should never have happened. And just like that, before the day has even begun, your jaw is tight and your chest is already heavy and you are back inside the story.

You carry it into the shower. You carry it to the kitchen. You carry it through conversations where you nod and smile while some part of your mind is elsewhere entirely — still in that room, still in that argument, still replaying what happened with a sharpness that time has done nothing to soften.

At night it is worse. The mind, as if it has been waiting all day for the silence, finally begins its work. You have the conversation again. The one that already happened, the one you have revised a thousand times. You say everything you actually wanted to say. You are clear and devastating and they finally, finally understand. You have this conversation hundreds of times. Thousands. And they never hear it. Nothing changes. And the only person present for any of it is you.

Sometimes you catch yourself mid-thought and realize your entire body has joined in. Your teeth are clenched together like

something that must not be let out. Your shoulders have crept up toward your ears without your permission. Your hands have tightened into something close to fists. The person is not in the room. They may not even be in your life anymore. They might be in another city, another country, another decade. And still — they are here. They are always here. Occupying a room in the house of your mind that you did not choose to build and do not know how to empty.

You hear their name in passing and feel a shift in your stomach, something dropping. You see a car like theirs and your breath shortens before your brain has caught up. A song comes on, a smell moves through a window, and suddenly you are not in the present at all — you are back there, in a moment that should be finished, that everyone else seems to have finished, but that you cannot seem to leave.

This is what unresolved pain actually looks like from the inside. Not the dramatic version. Not the film version where grief is photogenic and anger is righteous and everything resolves in a single cathartic scene. The real version: low-grade, constant, quietly exhausting. A hum beneath everything you do. A weight you have carried so long you have forgotten you are carrying it.

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Now think about the last time someone told you to forgive.

Maybe it was a friend who had heard the story enough times. Maybe it was a therapist, careful with their words. Maybe it was a parent, a sibling, a figure in a sermon — someone who meant well and landed badly. And maybe, if you are honest, something in you detonated.

I remember the first time someone said it to me. A person I trusted looked at me with that particular calm and said: "You know, at some point you are going to have to forgive them."

I stared.

"Forgi—" I could not even finish the word. "You want me to forgive them? After what they did? Absolutely not."

I was not just resistant. I was offended. Forgiving felt like handing them something they had not earned. Like signing a document that declared: what you did was acceptable, I release you from all consequences. Like watching them win a game I was the only one still playing.

It felt like betraying myself.

And so I held on. For a long time. Because holding on felt like the only power I had left. Because the anger felt, in some strange way, like loyalty — to the version of me that had been hurt, to the reality of what happened. Because I was afraid that the moment I forgave, some evidence would dissolve. Some record. Some proof that it had mattered at all.

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What I did not understand then — what I want to give you in this book — is this: forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. Not one thing.

The forgiveness I had been taught was a transaction. You wronged me. I absolve you. Now we are even. It was a gift extended to the guilty party. A door reopened. A debt marked paid. And if that is what forgiveness is, then refusing it makes complete sense — why would you hand someone a prize they did not earn?

But that is not what forgiveness actually is.

Real forgiveness is not a gift to them. It is a release for you. It is not saying what happened was acceptable. It is not reconciliation. It is not trust. It is not forgetting. It is the decision — made slowly, imperfectly, and often more than once — to stop letting the wound organize your life.

The heaviness you wake up with. The jaw you clench in the dark. That room in your mind where they still live rent-free while you pay the bill in sleep and presence and quiet daily joy. Forgiveness is not about freeing them from any of that.

It is about freeing yourself.

The moment I understood this, not just in my mind but somewhere lower and more physical, something shifted. Not immediately. Not dramatically. But something moved.

This book is about that shift. About what forgiveness actually is, and why we resist it so fiercely, and why that resistance is

completely understandable, and how the slow, nonlinear, sometimes maddening process of letting go might be the most important thing you will ever do for yourself.

Not for them. For you. Only for you.

Chapter One
Why We Don’t Forgive

"For almost nine years I kept a notes file on my phone. Every terrible thing she had ever said to me, written down. Dates, sometimes. I told myself I was keeping records. But I looked at it constantly. Before sleeping. When I was angry about something unrelated and needed a reason. I thought it was protecting me. It took years to admit that I was the only one it was hurting." — Amara, 34, Lagos

Amara had been genuinely wronged. There is no question about that. A close friend had betrayed her trust in a way that cost her professionally and personally, then vanished when confronted. The hurt was real. The anger was legitimate.

But the file was not a shield. It was a chain she had polished to a shine and called armor.

What strikes me about Amara's story is not the wound — it is the logic behind the file. The logic that says: if I hold on tightly enough, I am safe. If I keep the evidence, I cannot be gaslit. If I stay in the story, at least I am still in control of something.

That logic is not irrational. For many people, in the immediate aftermath of being hurt, it is exactly right. The anger protects. The vigilance serves a purpose. The refusal to pretend is, for a time, a form of dignity.

The problem is when the emergency response never gets the signal that the emergency has passed.

The Architecture of Resistance

When people struggle to forgive, it is rarely random. Beneath the surface of "I just can't" there is almost always a set of deeply held beliefs doing structural work. These beliefs feel like plain truth. They feel like seeing clearly. And in some versions of the world, they are partially right.

But partial truths can still trap us. Here are the ones that do the most damage.

The belief that forgiveness endorses what happened.

This is the most pervasive misunderstanding about forgiveness, and it stops more people than anything else combined.

The fear is this: if I forgive, I am in some way saying it was acceptable. I am softening the reality of what occurred. I am revising the moral record in their favor.

But forgiving and condoning are not the same operation. Not even close. When you forgive, you are not revising your assessment of what happened. You are not erasing the harm, or the person's responsibility for causing it. You are simply deciding that you no longer want the wound to be the organizing principle of your interior life.

Think of a surgeon removing a bullet. The surgery is not a statement about whether the shooting was justified. It is simply the choice to no longer leave a foreign object inside a living

body. The bullet caused the damage. The only remaining question is what happens next.

The belief that forgiving means losing:

This one runs especially deep when the person who hurt you has shown no remorse. When they moved on while you were still in the rubble. When they are out there, living their life, apparently unbothered, and you are the one who cannot get through a week without the memory surfacing.

In that context, forgiving feels like handing them a trophy. Like conceding a game you had every right to win. Like being the bigger person in a way that somehow only benefits them.

But here is the thing that took me a long time to actually feel, not just understand: they do not experience your forgiveness. Your resentment does not reach them. The pain you carry is not a message transmitted to the person who caused it. It exists entirely inside you. They are not suffering because of your anger. You are.

Forgiving does not mean they win. It means you stop losing.

The belief that forgiving means letting them back in.

This may be the most consequential confusion in the entire conversation around forgiveness. Forgiveness and reconciliation are different things. They live in different rooms. Reconciliation

requires the other person — their change, their accountability, the rebuilding of something mutual. Forgiveness requires only you.

You can forgive someone completely and never speak to them again. You can forgive and change the number. Forgive and keep the distance. Forgive and tell the truth about what happened when asked. The forgiveness happens inside you. What you do with the relationship is a separate decision, made by different criteria entirely.

The belief that forgiving means forgetting.

The phrase "forgive and forget" has caused genuine harm to how people understand this process.

Memory is not a moral failure. Remembering clearly and accurately does not mean you have not forgiven. In many cases, forgetting would be the least safe response available — memory carries information about what to protect yourself from, about what patterns to notice, about what dynamics to avoid.

What forgiveness changes is not the content of the memory but your relationship to it. The memory no longer hijacks you. It no longer pulls you backward into a state of emergency with the force of the original event. It becomes something you can hold, look at, and set down again. The way a scar is not a wound.

You do not need to forget. You only need to stop bleeding.

The Hidden Appeal of Staying Angry

There is something that does not get said often enough in conversations about forgiveness: resentment feels good sometimes.

Not all the time. Not forever. But in the immediate aftermath of being hurt, anger can arrive with a clarity and a cleanness that feels almost like relief. Here is the enemy. Here is the wrong. Here is a story where I know exactly who the villain is. In a life full of ambiguity, that kind of certainty is seductive.

Psychologists who study grievance have found that holding onto it can become part of how someone defines themselves. When you have been deeply hurt — when the hurt is significant enough, prolonged enough, unjust enough — the identity of "person who was wronged by X" can quietly become load-bearing. Releasing it means releasing something you have organized yourself around. That can feel, not like freedom, but like dissolution.

Resentment also produces an illusion of ongoing relationship. While you are angry at someone, you are still in some kind of contact with them. You are still responding to them, still in dialogue, still entangled. The moment you fully release the resentment, you step out of the story entirely. And that can feel like a kind of loss, even when the story was causing you harm.

"I was furious at my older brother for so long that I genuinely didn't know who I was without the anger. It had become my personality in a way I didn't see. When I finally started to let it go, I felt disoriented — almost bereft. Like I'd lost something I'd been carrying so long I'd mistaken it for part of myself." — Reza, 41, Tehran

None of this means you are broken, or weak, or that your resistance is shameful. It means you are human, and that you built your inner world around the most significant things that happened to you — including the painful ones.

But here is the question worth sitting with quietly, without judgment: is the story you are living in — the one where the wound is the center, the one that organizes so much of your energy — is that the life you are choosing? Or is it a room you moved into during a crisis, that you simply never left?

What We Were Taught, and Why It Confused Us

Most of us received a version of forgiveness that was fundamentally about other people.

Forgive because it is the right thing. Forgive because God commands it. Forgive because it shows your character, your evolution, your spiritual maturity. Forgive because it is what good people, patient people, enlightened people do.

There is nothing inherently wrong with those traditions. But when forgiveness is taught primarily as an obligation —

something you perform for moral or religious reasons, on behalf of someone else — two things reliably happen. The first is that people perform it without doing the actual inner work: they say the words while the resentment stays exactly where it was, untouched. The second is that people who are not ready to forgive — who still need more time, more grieving, more space — are made to feel guilty for the very wound they are still living with.

Neither outcome helps anyone.

The forgiveness I am describing in this book is not an obligation. It is not a performance. It is not evidence of spiritual advancement or moral superiority. It is a practical, personal, deeply self-interested act. You eventually choose it — when you are genuinely ready, not before — because you have held the weight long enough. Because the cost has finally become clear. Because some part of you, finally, is tired of paying it.

A moment to sit with

Which of the beliefs above feels most true to you right now? Which one has the strongest grip?

When you imagine forgiving, what are you afraid you would lose?

Whose life are you living when you are inside the resentment?

Chapter Two:
The Thing Living Inside You

There is a particular kind of tired that sleep does not fix.

You wake up after a full night and the heaviness is already there, waiting. You move through the day with a low background weight that colors everything — your patience shorter than it should be, your joy slightly muted, your presence somehow partial even in rooms you want to be fully in. You snap at someone you love and feel a confusion you cannot quite locate. Nothing is wrong, exactly. You are just — heavy.

That heaviness has a source. And most of the time, we do not connect it to what it actually is.

When we carry unresolved pain — the old anger, the grief that was never fully honored, the resentment that has calcified over months or years into something almost architectural — it does not sit quietly in a sealed room and wait for us to address it. It moves through our days with us. It leaks into our decisions, our relationships, our sleep, our bodies. It does not wait politely. It simply costs us, continuously, whether or not we acknowledge the bill.

Not a Stone. A Creature.

For a long time, I thought of unresolved resentment as a heavy object I was dragging. A stone in a backpack. Something with weight, but inert. Something that tired me out by its mass alone.