

Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Mornings

Daniel wakes up to a phone that has already been busy for hours. Overnight, an AI assistant sorted his inbox into three folders: needs a reply today, can wait, and safe to archive. It drafted three of those replies in his own tone of voice, learned from months of watching how he writes. His calendar app noticed a scheduling conflict forming for Thursday and proposed two fixes before he had opened his eyes. On his way to the office — a co-working space in a fast-growing tech district of a large coastal city — his ride is priced and routed by a model trained on millions of previous trips through those same streets.

At his desk, he opens a tool that will turn a rough product brief into a working prototype by lunchtime, something that used to take his team two weeks.

None of this feels remarkable to Daniel. It feels like Tuesday.

Amina also wakes up early, before the sun, because the walk to fetch water takes longer than it used to; the nearest reliable source moved further from the village two dry seasons

ago. Her phone, a basic model with a cracked screen she has learned to read around, has eleven percent battery, and she is rationing it, because the shop with a working outlet is forty minutes away and charges a small fee per hour of charging.

There is a cell tower visible from the hill above the village, tall and confident against the sky, but the signal it throws rarely reaches her house with any strength, and even when it does, a gigabyte of data costs a meaningful slice of what her family earns in a week. She has heard of ChatGPT, the way she has heard of the moon landing: a real thing, that happened, to other people.

Her day will be shaped by soil, weather, the price of maize at the market, and the health of a younger brother with a cough that has lingered for three weeks longer than it should. If a doctor is available at the regional clinic today, and if that doctor has access to any of the diagnostic tools now common in city hospitals, it will be because of decisions made far above her, in budgets and infrastructure plans she has never seen.

Both of these mornings are real, in the sense that millions of people are living one version or the other of them right now. Neither Amina nor Daniel is unusual.

That is the point of describing them. This is not a book about extremes — about the single poorest village on Earth versus the single richest tech founder. It is a book about the ordinary shape of a divide that already runs through entire

continents, entire cities, and often entire households, where a parent has never sent a text message and a child does homework with an AI tutor.

The same tool, two different worlds

Here is what makes this divide worth an entire book, rather than a paragraph in a bigger book about inequality in general: the gap between Amina and Daniel is not simply about money, though money matters enormously. It is a gap in whether a specific, fast-improving category of tool is available to help with the specific, ordinary problems of your life — diagnosing a sick child, pricing a harvest, writing a job application, catching a financial scam before it takes your savings, learning to read. AI is increasingly the layer that decides how efficiently, how cheaply, and how well those problems get solved for the people who have it.

For the people who do not, the old, slower, more expensive ways of solving those problems remain the only ways. And because AI tools tend to make already-efficient systems more efficient — a well-staffed hospital gets faster, a well-capitalized farm gets more productive, a well-funded school gets a personalized tutor for every student — the gap does not stay still. It tends to widen, unless something deliberately intervenes. That word, *deliberately*, will come up often in this book. Nothing

about the current shape of the AI divide is an accident of nature.

Every piece of it — where the fiber-optic cable was laid, which languages the engineers decided to prioritize, which countries received AI investment and which did not — was decided by someone, usually optimizing for a market, a return, or a research question that had nothing to do with Amina.

That is not a moral accusation against any individual company or engineer. It is simply how markets and research priorities work: they follow existing money and existing infrastructure, because that is where the fastest, cheapest wins are.

The result, unintended but entirely predictable, is a technology that got very good, very fast, at helping people who were already fairly well served, and has barely begun to help the roughly one in three human beings who were not.

Why “forgotten” is the right word

The subtitle of this book calls the second world “forgotten,” not “poor,” and the distinction matters. Poverty is an old, well-studied problem with an enormous field of research and policy behind it. Being forgotten by a specific wave of technology is a narrower, newer problem, and it can happen to people who are not poor in the traditional sense at all. A retired schoolteacher in a country with excellent internet, who never learned to use a smartphone, is forgotten by AI in one sense. A skilled soft-

ware engineer in a country whose government has banned or restricted access to the leading AI platforms is forgotten in another.

A speaker of a language with ten million fluent speakers, none of whom show up in the datasets that train the most capable models, is forgotten in a third sense, regardless of income. This book focuses heavily on the electricity-connectivity-device-skills-language stack, because that stack explains the majority of the global gap in raw numbers.

But “forgotten” is a wider net than “offline,” and later chapters will show how it catches people well inside the connected world too. By the end of this book, the goal is not for you to feel guilty about Daniel’s morning or hopeless about Amina’s. It is for you to see clearly enough what separates them that you can recognize the specific, fixable pieces of that gap — because most of it is fixable, has been fixed before in other technologies, and is being fixed right now in specific places by specific people whose work you will meet in Part Five.