

**Find It**

The first time I asked about it, Coach was wrapping my hands.  
The gym smelled like old leather and disinfectant. Heavy bags swung on their chains  
like lazy planets. I watched her work the tape between my fingers, quick and practiced,  
and the question slipped out before I could stop it.

*Coach... what's the gauge?*

**Coach**

*I asked*

*The gauge for what?*

**Coach**

*She raised an eyebrow*

*For... whether I'm doing this right. Not just the fighting. Life. Work.  
All of it. Some philosopher probably has an answer, I assume.*

**Coach**

*I hesitated*

*Philosophers usually have several. None of them pay gym rent.*

**Coach**

*She smirked*

She finished the last wrap and pushed my gloves toward me, then sat back on the old wooden stool like the throne of some worn-out queen.

*All right, here's mine.*

**Coach**

*...*

I expected something dramatic. A quote in Latin. A mystical metaphor about mountains.

Instead she said:

*You make a call. There are consequences. You take them. You learn and move on. That's the gauge.*

**Coach**

...

*That's... it?*

**The Fighter**

*I stared*

*That's as simple as it gets. You're not judged by not making mistakes. You're judged by whether you own what happens next.*

**Coach**

...

I flexed my fingers inside the glove. The leather creaked like it was also skeptical. She watched me, then nodded toward the ring.

*Up. I talk better when you're getting punched.*

**Coach**

...

We moved through a slow round, just jab-cross-breathe. Coach leaned on the ropes, calling out corrections.

*Chin down. You're not posing for LinkedIn. Again. Good.*

**Coach**

...

Between combinations she kept talking, like we'd opened a tap.

*Find a way of living by your own code, and be willing to pay the price for it. That's where it starts.*

**Coach**

...

*My own code, like values?*

**The Fighter**

*I repeated, throwing another jab.*

*Like rules you won't break even when it hurts. That's honor.*

**Coach**

...

The word hung there, heavier than the gloves.

*People make it fancy. Dramatic speeches, noble sacrifice, all that. But honor's just this: you decide what kind of person you are, and you act like it when no one's watching. Especially then.*

**Coach**

...

I thought of late nights in front of a laptop. Of shoving bugs under the rug because deadlines. Of quietly blaming *the system* when I knew damn well I'd cut the corner.

*Find your honor. Because without honor, there is no respect.*

**Coach**

...

She stepped into the ring and tapped my glove down.

*Again. And listen: when I say respect, I don't mean people liking your posts. I mean they can rely on you. They know you're dangerous but safe.*

**Coach**

...

*Dangerous but safe? That sounds like a bad dating profile.*

**The Fighter**

...

*Best kind. You know how you earn that? Honor. Consistency. You say you'll be there, you're there. You say you'll protect, you protect. You say you'll own your mistakes, you own them.*

**Coach**

...

I exhaled hard.

*And without respect, there is no discipline*

**The Fighter**

*I said quietly, remembering something I'd written in a notebook weeks ago.*

*Exactly. If you don't respect yourself, why would you bother doing the hard thing when you're tired? Why get up at six to run, why learn, why grow? And if no one else respects you, why would you care if you become a joke?*

**Coach**

*She snapped her fingers.*

She walked a slow circle around me as I moved.

*Discipline is doing what you decided matters, even when you don't feel like it. Honor tells you **what** matters. Respect gives you a reason not to throw it away when it's inconvenient.*

**Coach**

...

I let my guard drop a little, lost in thought. She flicked a glove against my forehead.

*Hands up. Thinking's good. Getting concussed, less so.*

**Coach**

...

We sat on the edge of the ring for water, legs dangling.

*You're restless because of that job thing again, aren't you?*

**Coach**

...

*They want to promote me. **Senior Software Engineer.** Sounds shiny. Part of me wants it. Part of me wants to run.*

**The Fighter**

*I shrugged*

*Don't marry the title. Not **Software Engineer**, not **Senior**, not **Lead Grand Archwizard of Microservices**.*

**Coach**

...

I snorted into my water bottle.

*Learn as much as you can. Experiment. Screw things up. Learn from that too. But don't confuse the label with the life.*

**Coach**

...

*So what am I supposed to say I am? At parties, I mean. People want a box.*

**The Fighter**

...

*Try this: **I'm defining my own code of living.***

**Coach**

*She tilted her head.*

*That sounds pretentious as hell.*

**The Fighter**

...

*It is. Say it in your head instead. Out loud, you can keep software. But  
in here*

**Coach**

*she tapped my chest with two fingers, gently*

*Know that the title is just packaging. The real thing is whether you're  
living according to your code.*

**Coach**

...

*And the price  
The Fighter  
I added*

*And the price. Yes, it will cause harm sometimes. You'll say no to  
things. People will be disappointed. You'll mess up trying to do the right  
thing and still hurt someone. That's life, not a bug report.*

**Coach**

*she agreed*

Her voice went softer.

*Yes, you will be held accountable. Sometimes by others. Always by  
yourself. And your job is not to dodge that. Your job is to honor it. To  
say: **I chose. This is on me. I'll repair what I can, and I'll  
carry what I can't.***

**Coach**

...

We sat in the hum of the gym for a moment—distant thuds from another bag, the whirr of a fan.

*Every person needs a purpose. Man, woman, non-binary space wizard, I  
don't care. Purpose doesn't have to be epic. It just has to be real.  
Something worth being disciplined for.*

**Coach**  
*she said finally*

*Like... fighting?*  
**The Fighter**  
*I asked*

*Fighting's just a training ground. Same with coding. Same with parenting or composing or farming or running a street food cart. Whatever you pick, you'll have to learn to control your mind, your body, and your emotions if you want to be any good at it.*

**Coach**

...

She leaned back on her hands.

*Only through discipline can that be achieved. Motivation is cute. Discipline is boring and holy.*

**Coach**

...

*Holy?*  
**The Fighter**  
*I repeated*

*Yeah, in the sense that it keeps you aligned with what you say matters. That's as sacred as it gets.*

**Coach**

...

She looked at me sideways.

*But here's the twist. You don't start with discipline. You start with respect. You treat yourself like someone whose life is worth not wasting.*

*You treat others like they're real, not NPCs in your story. That grows into discipline. And living that way, consistently, is what becomes honor.*

**Coach**

*she added*

*So it's a loop. Honor leads to respect, which leads to discipline, which leads back into honor.*

**The Fighter**

...

*Now you're doing philosophy. Try not to sprain anything.*

**Coach**

...

We stayed a while after class. The gym emptied. Neon bled through the high windows. The city buzzed beyond the cracked walls.

*I'm scared of choosing wrong. Of wasting my life on the wrong purpose.  
Wrong code.*

**The Fighter**

*I admitted finally*

Coach nodded like she'd heard that sentence a thousand times.

*You will choose wrong. Several times. Congratulations, you're alive.*

**Coach**

...

*That's comforting*

**The Fighter**

*I muttered*

*Listen, you're not a statue trying to pick the perfect pose for eternity.  
You're a creature in motion. You make a call, there are consequences,*

*you take them, you learn, you move on. That **is** the gauge. Not **was it perfect?** but **did I show up with honor, did I learn, did I try again better?***

Coach

...

*And if I don't?*

The Fighther

*I asked*

*Then you'll feel it. In your gut. In the way you avoid your own reflection. That's your soul's version of a failing unit test.*

Coach

*she shrugged*

I laughed, despite myself.

*Look, you keep waiting for someone to hand you permission or a title that means now you're valid. That's not coming. What you get instead is this: your own honor. Your own respect. Your own discipline. Those are yours to build, and yours to lose.*

Coach

...

She turned to me, suddenly serious in a way that cut through all the jokes.

*Find it. Find your honor. Not the one your parents wanted, not the one your company posters talk about, not the one you think impresses people online. **Yours.** The one you're willing to suffer for without becoming bitter.*

Coach

*said quietly*

I swallowed. The gym seemed very small all of a sudden, like we were sitting in the center of some much bigger ring.

*And when you find it*  
**Coach**

...

she went on

*Protect it. Not with walls, but with practice. With discipline. With how you treat people when you're tired. With how you treat yourself when you've failed.*

**Coach**

...

She slid off the ring, knees cracking.

*Story time's over. Tomorrow, same time. Bring your doubts and your jab.*

**Coach**  
*said*

I watched her walk away, turning off lights as she went. One by one, the bags vanished into shadow.

On the way home, my phone buzzed with emails. Project deadlines. Promotion talk. A recruiter advertising a *once-in-a-lifetime opportunity* that looked exactly like the last three.

I stared at the screen, then locked it.

No revelation. No trumpets. Just a quiet shift somewhere inside:

*I didn't know my full code yet. I didn't know my grand purpose. But I knew this: I wanted to be someone I could respect. Someone who owned their choices. Someone who didn't drop their gloves the second life hit back.*

Maybe that was where honor began.

Under the streetlights, hands still aching under the tape, I whispered it to myself like a promise, like a very small, very serious spell:

*Find it.*  
**The Fighter**

...