# Chapter 10: UMI Says

*"Shine your light on the world." — Mos Def*

Carrying this mission feels like walking with cracked ribs. Not broken enough to stop breathing. Just fractured enough that every breath hurts. Every rep. Every story. Every practice. Every time I tell a kid they matter in a system that’s already tried to tell them otherwise. That’s the ache of being awake in a game that still rewards silence.

Some days I want to put it down. Not the work—just the weight. The pressure to build better. To name the lie. To be the one who doesn’t just say, 'I see it,' but actually does something about it. The problem is: once you see it, you can’t unsee it. And once you’ve lived through what I’ve lived through, there’s no way back to pretending.

Max is part of that. Always. His absence isn’t an emptiness. It’s a reminder. That every kid I coach is someone’s Max. That every breath I get to hear from Cole and Lennox is sacred. And that silence—emotional silence, systemic silence, parental silence—isn’t neutral. It’s complicit. So I speak. I coach. I write. I show up.

My light? It’s not polish. It’s presence. It’s not charisma. It’s clarity. It’s not noise. It’s naming. Naming what this game does to kids. Naming what it’s done to me. Naming what it could be, if we let it breathe again.

I’ve spent years trying to define manhood by something more than toughness. More than titles. More than grind. I want my sons to know that real strength doesn’t mean hiding pain. It means carrying it without handing it to someone else. It means feeling everything, then still showing up with love. It means fighting for joy when sadness would be easier.

One night, I talked to my closest friend about Jay-Z. About his belief that everyone has genius inside them. That we all owe something to our block. Our community. Our lineage. Mine is clarity. Seeing through systems. Holding pain and purpose in the same sentence. That’s my genius. And it comes with obligation. That’s what Hov said. And he was right.

But what people miss is that this light work? It’s invisible. People see the quotes. The fire. The posts. But they don’t see the cost. The cracked ribs. The tired mornings. The self-doubt. The moments where you wonder if it even matters. Where you want to just be a dad. Just be a man. Not the guy carrying the torch.

And yet—I do. I carry it. Not because I want to be seen. But because I want kids to see themselves. Unbroken. Free. Worthy. Because I want my sons to say, 'My dad didn’t flinch.' Not once.

So I smile. I breathe. I build. Even when it’s heavy. Especially when it’s heavy. Because Umi said, shine your light. And I’m doing my best to listen.

This chapter isn’t about technique. It’s about truth. It’s about remembering why this matters. Why I matter. Why light isn’t a thing you earn. It’s a thing you carry. Quietly. Steadily. Purposefully. Even when no one sees it.

So yeah. I’m still here. And I still believe.

Not because it’s easy. But because it’s light. And it’s mine.