# Chapter 2: I Used to Love H.E.R.

“I met this girl when I was ten years old.” — Common

We didn’t need breakaway rims or shooting machines. We needed an egg crate, a utility pole, and a ball with just enough bounce to believe.  
  
That’s how I met her. The game.  
  
I was ten years old, maybe younger, hooping with a crate nailed to a telephone pole. The shots didn’t always go straight. The ball wasn’t always regulation. But it didn’t matter. It wasn’t about perfect form or clean mechanics. It was about imagination. About invention. I didn’t need drills. I needed space. I didn’t have a coach. I had rhythm. And she—basketball—was my first love.  
  
I loved her wildly, without agenda. There were no rankings, no metrics, no pressure. Just me, her, and a sense that I could become something through movement.  
  
Over time, things changed.  
  
Games got louder. Expectations crept in. I trained more, won more. I started caring about who was watching, not just what I was doing. I built a resume. But I didn’t realize what I was losing.  
  
It was subtle. Slow. Like watching fog roll in through a window left cracked open. You don’t notice until you can’t see clearly anymore.  
  
I still loved the game. But it didn’t feel like mine.  
  
Years later, I passed the game to my son. I thought I was giving him the same gift. Same love. Same spark. But I wasn’t.  
  
I gave him my blueprint. My rhythm. My expectations.  
  
And one day, in our driveway, I saw the cost.  
  
We were shooting. Just a casual afternoon. But I noticed something. The way he exhaled after a miss. The way his shoulders dropped—not from exhaustion, but from disappointment.  
  
He wasn’t failing. He was fading.  
  
That’s when it hit me.  
  
I used to coach for retention. For reputation. And even though I knew better, I hadn’t realized I was still carrying that into our driveway. I thought I was being present. But I was performing.  
  
So I stopped talking.  
  
And I asked him: “What do you like about the game?”  
  
Not “What do you want to achieve?” Not “What are your goals?”  
  
Just: “What do you enjoy?”  
  
It took him a while. He looked away. Then back. Then said, “When it’s fun.”  
  
That question—what do you like about the game—changed everything.  
  
We stripped it back. No cones. No timers. No feedback. Just movement. Just play.  
  
At first, it was awkward. For both of us. The silence. The mess. The absence of instruction.  
  
But then came the spark.  
  
The bounce in his step. The smile after a make. The pause between shots where he just stood there, breathing, present. And in those moments, I saw something I hadn’t seen in a long time.  
  
I saw myself.  
  
Not the coach. Not the grown-up. Not the dad trying to “do it right.”  
  
The kid. The crate. The crooked pole. The joy.  
  
That’s when I understood.  
  
Max Potential didn’t start with a whiteboard. It started in that driveway. It started in the silence. In the grief. In the realization that I had almost passed down pressure instead of play.  
  
This isn’t a redemption story.  
  
It’s a reminder.  
  
That joy isn’t the enemy of development. It’s the foundation.  
  
That freedom isn’t a luxury—it’s a requirement.  
  
That sometimes we don’t need to invent a new way. We need to return to the old one. The real one. Before the rankings. Before the metrics. Before the grind made us forget why we even started.  
  
I used to love her.  
  
I still do.  
  
But now I love her with eyes wide open.