# Chapter 6: Smile

“I often wish that I could save everyone, but I’m a dreamer.” — Scarface (feat. 2Pac)

He was ten years old. Crying on the court. His body slumped. Shoulders shaking. The game kept going. The coaches kept yelling. And his mother—she just sat there.  
  
I had to leave.  
  
Not because I couldn’t take it. But because staying would’ve made me complicit. If a stranger had been yelling at that boy in a grocery store, she would’ve intervened. But this wasn’t a store. This was sport. So she froze.  
  
And I get it.  
  
Because I used to freeze too. I used to normalize the noise. I used to believe the lie: that pressure makes diamonds, that tears mean toughness, that silence is strength.  
  
But now I know better.  
  
And knowing doesn’t mean I fix it all. It just means I see it. And once you see it, you can’t unsee it.  
  
Like the time I walked out of a gym because the energy felt violent. Not physical. Emotional. Philosophical. Kids yelling at other kids. Adults coaching through control and fear. Players running systems, not expressing themselves.  
  
The other team was smaller. Younger. They didn’t stand a chance. And still—the press, the traps, the screaming. All in the name of development.  
  
I couldn’t breathe. So I left.  
  
But the pain followed me home.  
  
Because I knew kids were going back into that gym the next day.  
  
And parents—well-meaning, loving parents—would still sign the check. Still say, “He’s tough on them, but he gets results.”  
  
But what kind of results?  
  
At what cost?  
  
There was another moment.  
  
A kid—not one of mine—told his mom on the car ride home: “I like basketball now because Coach Hold makes it fun again.” He didn’t say it to me. He wasn’t trying to impress. He just felt safe enough to speak the truth.  
  
And that truth wrecked me.  
  
Because he was eleven. Eleven.  
  
What kind of world are we building where eleven-year-olds already need to be rescued?  
  
This chapter isn’t about rage.  
  
It’s about grief.  
  
The kind that creeps in quietly. The kind that builds when you see kids breaking and no one calls it broken. When you see parents chasing opportunities, not because they’re careless—but because they’re scared. Scared their kid will fall behind. Scared they’ll miss the window. Scared they’ll regret not doing more.  
  
I’ve been that parent.  
  
I’ve chased that fear.  
  
I’ve confused pressure with preparation.  
  
And now, I coach with that memory in my chest.  
  
Because what we’re doing isn’t just misinformed. It’s harmful.  
  
We are sacrificing becoming on the altar of visibility.  
  
We are trading joy for exposure.  
  
We are preparing kids to perform—but not to love. Not the game. Not themselves.  
  
So yeah, I smile.  
  
Not because it doesn’t hurt.  
  
But because smiling is the most human thing I’ve got left in a culture that rewards coldness. It’s how I breathe when the air gets tight. It’s how I resist the urge to scream.  
  
It’s not surrender.  
  
It’s survival.  
  
And yes, I wish I could save everyone.  
  
But I know I can’t.  
  
So I hold space for the ones who are ready.  
  
I smile because I’ve seen what joy looks like on a kid’s face when they remember why they play.  
  
I smile because every time someone chooses love over fear, a little light gets through.  
  
I smile because this system isn’t fixed yet—but I’m still here.  
  
And that?  
  
That’s the dream.