Chapter 1: Moment of Clarity

*"I dumbed down for my audience to double my dollars / They criticized me for it, yet they all yell ‘holla.’” — Jay-Z*

I didn’t show up to that game as a coach.

I showed up as a dad.

But everything about me still coached.

My posture.

My presence.

My silence.

It all said something—

even if I didn’t.

And what it said was clear:

This matters more than breath.

Cole sat next to me.

Jersey pulled. Knees twitching.

Said his stomach hurt.

I told him it might be nerves.

Told him to breathe.

Told him he’d be fine.

He wasn’t.

His shoulders curled.

His breaths skipped.

His face pale.

Nine years old.

And already

he couldn’t breathe.

Over a game.

The coach had hyped them.

Said they were better.

Said they had to win.

Cole believed him.

Not because he said it well—

but because he said it first.

And because I didn’t say anything different.

That’s the part I can’t forgive myself for.

He couldn’t breathe

because I taught him winning

was oxygen.

Not in words.

In posture.

In silence.

In what I didn’t stop.