

DEATH TAX [EXCERPT]

MAXINE

That's the type of thing that makes one wonder. You're here and he's back in Haiti. It's peculiar is all.

TINA

I do have a kid. Yes. And he is in Haiti. And I am here. But that's all you know.
Is that all you know?

MAXINE

...

TINA

That is all you know. And you've made up, in your head, a whole story about it.
But whatever I tell you, you'll tell yourself is a lie.
My word against -- who knows what.
Well. Here.

Here's something that I can show you.

(TINA takes her badge, flips it around, takes out a laminated photo.)

That's him. That's John Paul.

Alright.

You see he's real. He's 8 years old. And he's real. And

I dunno, what can I tell you --

He likes to swim. He swims fast.

And... he also likes diving.

He wants to be on a diving team.

He does well in school.

He's one of the smartest in his class.

He is maybe number 2 or 3 in his class -- he's very smart.

He reads lots of books. He's read the entire Bible.

He memorizes whole pieces from the Bible.

And someday, he wants to be either a doctor
or a preacher.

And he acts like a little adult sometimes. He has very serious eyes.

My husband and I, we would fight. And he would try to talk to us.

He would try to make the fight stop, he would try to work it out,
like he was a little marriage counselor.

That's the type of kid he is. Wise beyond his years. Kind of weird.

And I look at him, and I ask myself how did I make that?

How did that come from me?

He is the best thing I ever made. There is no reason, no reason, I should have made him.

Because I *was*,

I *was* bad.

When I was young. I'm different now.

I gotta little bit of the feeling left, but I'm different. I've changed.

But when I was young, I was a bad girl.

I did a lot of drugs. I did a lot of partying.

I did a lot of things I should not have done.
I got with men, men who were the dangerous kind, I liked a bit of danger.
If there was no danger there was no spark.
My husband was one of those types.
Nasty.
Mean.
Type that would kick you when you're down and keep on kicking.
And I was not better, when I was young, I was not better.
And together, we were a nasty pair.
And I did stuff, I did all sorts of stuff with him,
before we had our kid,
a lot of stuff that could get me in a lot of trouble,
stuff I had to keep a secret,
stuff I will never talk about for the rest of my life.
I swear I will never --
And it is like I am always being punished for it.
And maybe I deserve to be punished, but I am trying,
trying to be good.

MAXINE

...

TINA

I tried. When my son was born, I got scared,
I got scared for him, and I stopped that old life, I became a Christian, I took my son to church, and we
moved here, we moved away from the, from the shit, the shit of our past, we moved away from it.
But my husband, he stayed the same.
And I knew I could not let my son be exposed to that.
And I left him, we got divorced.
But we had to share custody.
And one weekend, he had my son, and my son did not come back.
He took my son back to Haiti.
And I called the police, and they said there was nothing they could do.
I called the senator: Nothing.
Governor: Nothing.
Anyone I could call I called: Nothing.
They say, oh the laws are different there than here.
They say, oh we can't get involved.
They say, we don't have any power.
They say, you need a special type of lawyer for that.
They say, you need to go there, go back to Haiti and fight in their courts, not our courts.
And my husband, my *ex*-husband, he says, you come back here, I'm gonna dig up all that shit from
your past. You'll never get him. You'll never get anything. I'll dig up all that stuff, they'll arrest you for
even coming back here. You'll pay, he says.

MAXINE

...

TINA

And my son, he is the best thing I ever made, he is the best thing I ever made, and I cannot live without him.

I am here for one reason. I am here to get my son back.

I am here, just trying to work hard, make a nice home, buy a house, a house with a pool, a diving board for John Paul, so he can practice his diving, and a yard for a dog, because he always wanted a dog. And John Paul will come here and he will go to school here, and he'll play on the diving team, and he'll have his dog, and he'll go to college and become a doctor or a preacher. And I will make a nice home here, and the courts will see that he is better with me than his father, and I will save up money and I will get a lawyer, and my lawyer will fight this, and I will win. Because John Paul is the best thing I ever made. And I made him.
And he is mine.

MAXINE

...

TINA

Do you understand? Do you see where *I* am coming from?

MAXINE

... I do.

TINA

Ms. Judson. I am begging you.

(Down on her knees.)

I am begging you. I don't want any trouble. That's all. I've had enough trouble. I don't need trouble from the police. I don't need anything on my record, anything that could hurt my chances of getting my boy back. Please. Please think of that. Please consider that when you say stuff like the stuff you are saying, you are hurting me and my son. You are hurting my son. Look.

(TINA holds out the picture.)

This is my son. You need to understand that. This is who you are hurting.

MAXINE

So that's the reason.

TINA

Yes...

MAXINE

That's your reason for taking money from my daughter. You need the money to get your new house and get your lawyer and --

TINA

Oh sweet Jesus --

MAXINE

You're desperate. That's what you're telling me. That's what I'm hearing.

[END OF EXCERPT]