

# DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

**MISSY MAXWELL WORTON**

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

## Chapter 13

### FRIDAY

*“And I am sure of this,  
that he who began a good work in you  
will bring it to completion...”*  
—Philippians 1:6, ESV

Friday. The day we would finally be able to go home.

Although we had only been back in Ethiopia for four days, it felt like months. I woke up with peace. The tremors under my feet were no longer there and the feeling of an impending volcanic explosion had vanished.

I looked at Mark. I could tell it had been another sleepless night for him. His eyes were starting to sink in, and the dark circles beneath them were deepening. He was terribly distracted, and every question or comment I made to him went unanswered.

McKenzie, on the other hand, was awake and ready to go shopping. Dave was waiting for us, so we got ready and said our goodbyes. We left Mark looking dazed, and Favor pouting that she couldn't go.

The cultural market shops were just starting to open as Dave pulled onto the empty street. Owners were placing goods outside to draw the buyers in. I glanced at my list of gifts—mostly scarves and coffee—that I wanted to pick up for those back home. Dave parked, and our car was immediately surrounded by the children and teens who lived on the streets. At first I found anxiety rising in my chest, seeing all the people gather around us, but then my heart rose up with compassion. The reality of their brokenness overwhelmed me.

McKenzie cuddled close to me and put her arms through mine.

“Stay in the car,” Dave said. “I will come around to get you out.” As he walked around to us the kids stepped away and scattered quickly in all directions.

“Wonder what he is saying to them,” McKenzie said.

“I don't know,” I said. “My heart breaks for them. I know they're just trying to survive.”

“Are they all homeless?” she asked.

“Probably.”

We got out of the car and briskly walked into one of the shops that we had been in before. I bought several beautiful scarves and jewelry. McKenzie picked out a few earrings and necklaces for her girlfriends back home.

“Be sure to pick out a few things for yourself,” I reminded her. “It's your birthday in a few days. It's not every birthday that you can say you shopped in Ethiopia!”

“We'll be home for my birthday,” she reminded me. Just hearing her declare being home put a smile on my face.

Within an hour, we were done shopping. We had spent most of our money at the first shop, and had bags to prove it. Every shop we passed after that thought we were big spenders. Dave was great,

always close by our side, watching over us and waiting. He had such a sweet and kind spirit about him, but he was also vigilant in guarding us. Walking back to the car, a group of boys made their way to us. They were enamored with McKenzie. Dave had done a wonderful job at keeping them a fair distance from her most of our time shopping, but this time one of the boys ran up to her and put his hand out.

McKenzie stopped in her tracks and looked at him. His face and hands had been disfigured badly by burns. I noticed that he had been following us since we arrived today, but now McKenzie really saw him with compassion. Looking in his eyes, McKenzie grabbed his deformed hand and gently held it with his palm up. With her other hand she reached into her pocket and pulled out a handful of candies mixed with some Ethiopian money. She put it in his hand and closed his fingers around it.

“You are loved,” she said to him.

He smiled, gave her a big hug, then stood back and admired her from a distance. He hastily put the handful of goodies in his pocket as other children made their way to her. Dave stood beside us, smiling and watching McKenzie give out all she had in her—and my—pockets.

When we got back to our hotel room, I realized that all the bags we had brought from the market were gifts. McKenzie had used all her birthday money to buy others something special from Ethiopia. She was so happy and exuberant. I will always look back on this day, knowing my daughter got it right. It is so much better to give than receive.

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I finished packing, and we all went to eat lunch by the pool.

Mark was on edge, watching every movement around us. For the fifth day in a row, he ordered food but didn't take a bite. I was resolved that this was the set path for us, or we would've flown out yesterday. But deep inside, I could feel the peace that I felt earlier slipping away and an uneasiness creeping in. I wasn't confident that Favor was safe and in the clear.

Several couples came out with their newly adopted children. Everyone was so jubilant, holding their little ones. I'm sure they'd dreamed about this moment since they started their adoption process, waiting and longing for that precious one to be in their arms. Such a genuine contentment rests on you those first days together. There might be a little dash of fear, or that split second when you ask yourself, *What did I get myself into?* But overall, there is unadulterated joy. I wanted to celebrate with them, but all I could do was stare. We didn't have that joy this time. Was it because we both knew, deep down, that a piece of paper didn't protect Favor from this man? We'd been told everything was okay and there was nothing that could stop us from taking her home. *So why did I feel so vulnerable and uncertain?*

I looked around. I felt unsafe...like someone was watching us. I quickly scanned to where the girls were. They were playing in one of the side pools. I looked around again. Everything seemed normal, but my spirit was feeling danger. Something wasn't right.

At 2 p.m., I said that we needed to get back to the room and take showers before we could leave for the airport. Favor jumped out of the pool with excitement.

“America! We go?” She looked at me with a huge smile. She had been waiting for this time since learning of her forever family and her new home in the States.

“Yes,” I said. “We need to go get ready, so we can leave.” With shouts of elation, Favor clapped

her hands together and threw her arms around McKenzie.

We hadn't been in the room for even a minute when the phone started ringing again. When it stopped, I called Pochi.

"Pochi, did you just call?" I asked.

"No," she responded. "I'm certain it was Adefere. He is acting crazy. He keeps calling, asking me why I have not grabbed the kid back from you. Missy, he is very upset that you have not answered his calls or contacted him."

"He told us not to have any contact with him!" I said in my defense. "He made that rule—we didn't! Besides, why would we talk to a man telling people to grab our child?"

I looked at Mark. He could hear Pochi from where he stood.

"That's what I told him," she said. "He is very upset and says his agency can get in a lot of trouble over this. He is going to try to stop you from leaving with her, but he can do nothing. She is yours. He is just trying to scare you. You should hear what they are saying to Favor's aunt."

I hated that they would bother her.

"They're telling her that she's going to jail for what she did," Pochi said. "She laughs at them."

"She can't go to jail for what she did for us, can she?" I asked.

Pochi laughed. "Of course not," she said. "They are the ones who are wrong in this. They are scared."

"You are sure there is nothing he can do to take her away from us?" I needed to hear a confident reply.

"No," Pochi said. "You have all the papers saying she is yours."

I glanced at Favor. She was bouncing around, digging through the packed bags to find some dry clothes. "Are you still coming to say goodbye?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," Pochi said. "I will be there in about an hour."



*Pochi with Favor.*

Mark unplugged the phone after I hung up. I'm not sure why it took so long for us to figure that one out. I helped the girls get cleaned up and packed, and then jumped into the shower to get ready before our long journey home.

My hair was still dripping wet when Pochi arrived. Favor jumped into her arms and exclaimed with excitement that she was leaving to America.

Without a word, Pochi shook her head and hugged her tightly. At one point, Pochi looked up at me with a telling gaze. I knew the look—it was fear.

Favor ran to her bed and came back with a gift neatly wrapped and handed it to Pochi.

“For me?” she asked.

Favor nodded her head. With anticipation, Favor watched as if she didn't know what was behind the pink paper, clearly more excited to see the gift than Pochi was to open it. The paper was pulled back to reveal some beautiful purple earrings that Favor had picked out for Pochi to wear to church. Pochi laughed—they were huge! I took a picture of the two of them together.

I could tell Pochi was nervous, and I couldn't wait to find out why. I gave Favor my phone and set up a game she could play while we sat with Pochi and got caught up on the latest.

“Okay,” Mark started, “is there anything Adefereese can legally do to stop us from leaving with our daughter?”

Pochi paused, taking a few deep breaths, thinking for a moment before her reply. “The only place you could be stopped would be at immigration, but that is not very likely since you have all of Favor’s paperwork and all of the steps to adopt her were done legally. Everything was done correctly.”

“Why are you nervous?” I asked.

Pochi looked up at me like a kid getting caught in the cookie jar. “I am very nervous about Adefere,” she said. “He is supposed to be a very good man, but he is very upset about this. Someone has got him scared.”

“Why didn’t you tell us that immigration could stop us?” I asked. “Nobody said anything about immigration until now. Now it’s too late.”

“I didn’t think about it until now. It’s very unlikely though.”

“But, it’s possible?” I asked.

Pochi nodded her head.

I glanced up at Mark with a piercing look. *Why did I ever stop pushing to leave early?*

We talked for the next hour, then prayed with Pochi and said our goodbyes. I kept questioning why we weren’t told, until today, that immigration stopping us was a possibility. *Were we being set up to fail? What if Pochi was in on it? It didn’t take a genius to see that she didn’t want us to leave.*

I finished the last of the packing and sat down to send our prayer warriors a final message before we would board the plane:

There is never a dull moment. We are being harassed and threatened by the agency we went through to adopt Favor. They asked the orphanage director to “grab” her from us and return her to them. They are threatening the person who helped rescue Favor telling them that they are going to jail for what they did. We have finally unplugged our phone because of the non-stop calls, and I now have a husband who has gone into “stealth” mode! We are sneaking around everywhere! The girls think it’s fun. Giggling in the midst of the storm. That’s our God!! We continue to know that we are in the palm of God’s hand. On a rescue mission for Him. What an adventure. Feel humbled that He thinks we are worthy of this calling...

Then it happened.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw something white. A second note was quietly slipped under our door. This time the note was handwritten and unsigned. Whoever delivered it quickly got out of the hallway.

This is to inform you that your court decree is Suspended. You can’t take the kid with you, if you already have a plan to do that. The immigration is already notified. I wish this never happened. I could not reach you by any means. I warned you.

We immediately recognized that it was from Adefere by the way he referred to our daughter as “the kid.” You could see the anger in the messy strokes of penmanship. Mark’s heart began to pound, and his head started to throb as he rushed downstairs to the front desk. He looked around the lobby

for any familiar faces, but saw none.

“Did you see who wrote this?” Mark asked, putting the note in front of the desk clerk. He looked at it briefly, shook his head, then called over the manager.

“How can I help you, Mr. Worton?”

“I need to know who wrote this note!” Mark said. “Did you see the person who wrote this and had it delivered to my room?”

The manager looked at the envelope and called someone over. He asked the man if he saw the person. The answer was the same. Nobody had seen the person who wrote the note or delivered it. Mark could see they had no clue. That in itself made the matter worse.

“This note is from the person who has been harassing us for the past two days and is the reason we’ve had to ask you to shut off our phone. He is threatening to grab our daughter from us.”

The manager’s eyes widened with concern as he looked at the note Mark was holding.

Mark was genuinely scared for his family; a man he hardly knew was threatening to take his daughter. Now, his entire family could be put in harm’s way because of this man’s obsession with getting Favor back for his own benefit.

Mark tried to calm himself before he continued, but tears were welling up in his eyes as he spoke. “The concern I have right now is that this man knows when we are leaving and knows our flight schedule. I am afraid something will happen to my family on the way to the airport. This man is desperate!”

The manager listened intently, then called the concierge over and spoke briefly to him before turning back to Mark. “Mr. Worton,” he calmly replied, “we will make sure that you and your family are safely escorted to the airport. We are calling in our best security to protect your family all the way there. I will guarantee your safety, Sir.”

“Thank you,” Mark felt a little relief, but was still stirred.

“What time do you need to leave for the airport? We will have everything ready.” The manager said.

“We need to leave by 6 p.m.” Mark replied and took a deep breath. “Thank you.”

“We are happy to help you with this. Please don’t worry, we will protect your family to the airport.”

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My heart was pounding as I sat in front of my computer. Was this really happening? I hoped that we wouldn’t be stopped at immigration. I didn’t want to think about how I would feel toward Mark if we were stopped and put in a situation that could possibly lead to losing Favor. My heart felt heavy, and I could feel hopelessness trying to slither in. I blamed myself for not going down to the ticket counter and buying tickets myself. *Why did I leave it up to Mark? Why did I always think I had to submit if what I was feeling was right?*

My hands were still on the keyboard. It had been a few minutes since Mark had left with the note to talk to the manager. I pushed back the negative thoughts and decided that God could do whatever He wanted too. He had performed so many miracles for us so far...He could perform a miracle again. He could make us invisible if He needed to. Nothing was impossible for our God.

Mark returned to the room. I could feel the tension in his voice. "Okay," he said. "The hotel is going to have security escort us to the airport."

He was stressed and exhausted.

"I talked with the vice-consul and he confirmed that we could be stopped at immigration, but he seriously doubted that Adefere had that kind of power. So we just need to get through immigration and we're on our way home."

"Why didn't he tell you yesterday that we could be stopped by immigration?" I asked.

"He said that he seriously doubts that we would get stopped!" Mark snapped. "I think we'll be fine."

All I could do was look at him standing there. I hoped with all my heart we would be fine. At this point I knew our story had taken a turn for a different ending. I wasn't sure if it was going to be a miracle at immigration or an extended battle to keep a daughter who I loved dearly. I was committed to her, no matter what this new ending would look like.

With trembling hands, I finished the message to our prayer warriors:

...One more URGENT PRAYER REQUEST. Pray we are invisible to the enemy as we leave and go through the airport, especially through immigration. We've had the Embassy and the orphanage director tell us the only way they can stop us is at immigration. It seems that our case is exposing something the enemy has been doing for some time and it involves some corruption. Our agency knows when our flight is, so we are at a disadvantage. I'm sure they feel that if we get out and expose this, all hell will break loose. The orphanage director came and prayed with us and said many are praying for us. We are so thankful for all the prayer warriors standing in this battle. We know we couldn't have done it without each one of you. We have been stretched and have had to go to a whole new level of faith in this hour. We're soaking in songs like, "Our God," and other songs that declare the awesomeness of our God. We're holding on to all the promises spoken over us. We have been made more than conquerors through the blood of Jesus Christ!

We leave for the airport within the hour and as I'm writing this, we are still being harassed. Our phone is now unplugged. We just received a letter saying our adoption is suspended. It's not on official paper...we know they're desperate. Our flight takes off in five hours. For a person who used to be terrified to fly, I can't wait for the wheels of our plane to be off the ground. Hopefully, the next message I send you will be from America! Love You! Thank you!

Missy and Mark