

DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

MISSY MAXWELL WORTON

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

Chapter 9

RESCUE MISSION

*“God deliberately chooses imperfect vessels—
those who have been wounded, those with physical or
emotional limitations. Then he prepares them to serve and
sends them out with their weakness still in evidence, so that
his strength can be made perfect in that weakness.”*

—Christine Caine, *Undaunted: Daring to do what God calls you to do*

It was 4 o'clock in the morning. Today was the day of the rescue. Mark and I laid in our bed wide awake. Our night had been restless, and we hadn't slept much. My whole body shook with exhaustion and nerves.

The Islamic call to prayer went out about the time that we realized we were both awake. I admired that they started their day with prayer, but I wished they would've found a closet to take it to. I got up and shut the sliding glass door, and as they sang their morning prayers, I turned my prayers to Jesus. I longed for peace, and I could feel my spirit longing to be with the Father.

A few hours passed, then Pochi called with a nervous excitement in her voice. The rescue mission had begun. Emebet, Favor's aunt, had left the hospital that morning and caught the early bus to Debre Birhan. She had just been at the official's office, and had signed the papers to release Favor into her custody. Soon, she would be on her way to pick Favor up at the disclosed location. At this point, the official did not suspect a thing.

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After all we had learned from Pochi, we were surprised when Josiah from EAI actually arrived to pick us up for our embassy appointment. We knew Josiah was a good guy, and maybe he was acting on his own and just keeping his word to us. But we also knew someone at EAI was avoiding us like the plague—someone who may have had influence on Josiah's employment. So it didn't surprise us that Josiah was more than 30 minutes late. The van was a sight to see—Josiah had to bang on the side door to get it open. The vehicle had one row to sit in, and it was against the back of the van. We stepped over a wheel to get to our worn leather seat. Jamila, the woman who had gone with us to our court date in August, sat in the passenger seat in the front of the van with a stack of papers on her lap. She never looked at us. Mark and I remained quiet during most of the drive to the Embassy.

Mark looked at his watch. It had been 30 minutes since we had heard from Pochi. “They should have picked up Favor by now and be on their way here,” Mark whispered to me.

“They have picked her up?” Jamila's voice startled us. She looked shocked about the news and shot a glance toward Josiah. In that instant, Mark and I knew that we needed to be more careful around anyone from EAI. We hoped that we had not just unraveled the rescue plan and put Favor and her aunt in danger.

When we arrived at the Embassy, Josiah let us out on the curb and said he would be back after

dropping off Jamila at another location. He assured us that someone with EAI would be waiting for us. We nervously went through security and into the waiting area. Other than the security officer at the door, no one greeted us. The room was filled with adoptive families and their sweet babies and children in their arms. My heart ached for Favor.

We felt out of place, and we didn't know what to do next. Mark approached one of the windows to ask for directions while I looked around, hoping to see someone from EAI. I recognized a woman who had been working in the EAI office the day of our court date. I walked past her to make sure. She glanced up at me then quickly looked down at the floor.

Mark came up behind me, "Hey," he said, "recognize anyone from EAI?"

"Maybe," I replied, as I pointed her out to Mark. "See that woman in the black, long skirt? I think she was the one that processed our paperwork last time we were here."

"She is. Has she seen us?" he asked.

"She looked right at me and back down," I said, "quickly."

"Maybe she doesn't recognize you," he said.

"Let's go re-introduce ourselves," I said with a mocking grin. We then started walking toward her. You could literally see her trying to disappear into her chair as I approached.

"Hi," I said with a huge Tennessee smile. "Do you remember us?" She looked up with knowing eyes and said nothing. "We're the Wortons. We're here for our embassy appointment today."

"Josiah said someone from EAI would be here, and here you are! Yay!" I said, putting one arm up in a victory wave. She continued to sit in silence, staring at me, expressionless. It was an awkward moment. "Alrighty then...Do you know English?"

"Yes," she shot back, obviously offended, "I know English very well. I know who you are."

"Oh good," I said. "I wasn't trying to offend you. You weren't saying anything. I thought I'd better ask." It was clear that we were the last people in the world that this woman wanted to be near, no matter what I said or did. Everything in me wanted to be rude and forget all about showing any type of love or kindness.

She jumped out of her seat, walked passed us and up to the window, where she began a conversation with an Ethiopian gentleman. We continued to wait until Josiah arrived a few minutes later. His smile was welcoming. If he knew anything, he wasn't letting it interfere with the way he treated us.

"Worton, Mark family," came through the sound system. Mark and I walked up to the window. The vice-consul stood on the other side of the bulletproof glass. He was an all-American-looking, tall, blonde man. He was young, maybe early 30s at the most. He had a friendly face and a way about him that put us at ease.

"Hi," he said as he glanced up at us. "You're Favor Mark Worton's parents, correct?"

"Yes," Mark said. "She isn't with us...is that a problem?"

"No," he responded. "We're aware of the situation in Debre Birhan. This is the second child we've had to deal with concerning this problem."

"Is there anything you can do to help us?" I asked.

“We plan to send someone to the court hearing tomorrow,” he said. “We would like to dig a little deeper to see why they went into the orphanage and removed the children. Once we have more information, we’ll do what we can.”

We finished the remaining paperwork, and we were told to come back at 10 a.m. on Thursday for Favor’s passport/visa and the packet that, once she arrived in the U.S., would make her an official American citizen.

“Will we still be able to get her passport and visa if she’s not with us?” Mark asked.

“I see no reason why you wouldn’t,” he responded. “She is your daughter.”

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On the drive back to our hotel, my heart suddenly started beating faster, and my spirit leapt. I looked around and saw that we were passing a bus station. The way my body was responding in this particular moment, I felt like I would see Favor. My eyes scanned the crowds of people, but there was no sign of her. I looked at my watch. It was 12 p.m. The rest of the drive, I felt like my heart would beat out of my chest if I didn’t hold it in.

“What time did they tell you to return to the Embassy to pick up her passport and visa packet?” Josiah asked.

“Thursday morning at 10,” Mark answered.

“I will pick it up for you and bring it to your hotel,” Josiah said.

“I’d like to go with you,” Mark said.

“This is not necessary. We always pick up the packet and bring it to the families.”

“No...” Mark responded, “I would like to go.”

“Okay.” Josiah shrugged his shoulders. “This is a very unusual request, but I will pick you up at your hotel on Thursday when I go to pick up your packet.”

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The phone rang the moment we walked into our hotel room. It was Pochi. “Hello,” she said with a flair. All the nervousness was gone.

“Hey, Pochi!” Mark said. “Do you have some good news for us?”

McKenzie squealed with excitement as she heard her dad’s comment. She ran over and hugged me. “Is she here, Mom? Oh, please let her be here.”

“I think Dad’s trying to find out,” I said. We both quickly hushed and got as close as we could to hear the telephone conversation in progress.

“They arrived at the bus station at 12 p.m. and immediately called us,” Pochi said excitedly. “Oh, she wants to see you so badly. She is already asking, ‘Where is my momma? Where is my dad? Have they come for me?’”

Our eyes filled with tears.

“When can we see her?” Mark asked.

“Favor’s aunt wants to meet you at the EAI office to get the papers that prove you are Favor’s legal guardians,” Pochi said. “This is her insurance that what she is doing is totally legal. She doesn’t

trust these people to not come after her and put her in jail, once they find out what she did. She is being very smart about this.”

“We understand. When can we meet?” Mark asked.

“Right now,” Pochi said. “We will be at your hotel in five minutes to pick you up. Pastor, who works with the orphanage, will drive Favor and her aunt to EAI and meet us there!”

Mark hung up the phone, and the screaming of the girls began! McKenzie’s joy was almost uncontainable as she jumped up and down, clapping her hands with excitement.

“We gotta go,” I said as I grabbed my video camera. We bolted out the door to meet Favor.

“Did I hear Pochi say they arrived at 12 p.m. today?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Mark answered.

“We drove past the bus station at 12 p.m.! My heart knew she was there! We were so close, I could feel her.”

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Pochi picked us up within minutes. A man we didn’t recognize was in the front seat. Sensing our apprehension, Pochi told us not to worry because he was from her church.

“McKenzie,” Pochi asked, “are you excited to meet your little sister?”

“I can’t wait!” McKenzie replied.

“She will look a little different when you see her,” Pochi started. “They shaved her head. She looks like a boy.”

“What?” I said. “Why would they do that to her?”

“No reason,” Pochi said.

“What do you mean, no reason?” I asked. “That had to be devastating to her. She loved her hair.”

“Favor wouldn’t say why,” Pochi said. “She just wanted to keep peace with this woman. Her aunt is very mad about it.”

“That is so mean,” McKenzie said. “I feel bad for her. I’m going to love on that cutie and not even notice.”

I tried not to assume things, but I knew that sometimes to shame a girl, they would shave her head. Then I wondered if they were trying to change her look, or if she had lice. Why on earth would you shave a little girl’s hair off? I longed to hold her and make everything better. What else had happened to her since I saw her last? My heart ached and I was angry they had put her through something so traumatic.

“Oh,” Pochi yelled back at us, “EAI is still denying that you are in town.”

“Well,” I said, “it’ll be tough to deny we’re in town once we show up on their doorstep.”

“They did not want you to come here,” Pochi said. “But the aunt demanded a copy of the court decree and Favor’s birth certificate.”

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We finally pulled over outside of the EAI offices. I could see the blue gate that we had passed through after coming back from court last time we were in Ethiopia. *How would they respond to us showing up?*

Mark and I didn't know what would happen next. All we could concentrate on was being reunited with Favor. I handed my video camera to Pochi's friend from church in the front seat and asked if he would record our reunion with our daughter. I wanted the moment when she would be back in our arms captured.

We waited about three minutes, and then a red truck pulled up behind us. I could see that the Pastor who Pochi had mentioned was with Emebet. He was a tall, husky man with a smile that put you at ease from the first moment you saw him. I'm sure he had a name, but everyone who knew him affectionately called him Pastor. Then I saw a little figure pop up from the back seat between them. It was Favor! When her eyes caught ours, she began to jump up and down.

"There she is!" Pochi announced. "She is so happy to see you. Look at her!"

I couldn't get to her fast enough. Emebet jumped out of the front seat and threw her arms around me first.

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you for what you did for us today."

She held me tightly and whispered in my ear, "Please take her to America, quickly! Please, promise me."

"We will, we will," I said. "I promise you. Thank you, Emebet!"

The back truck door opened, and I saw Favor's little feet hit the ground, running toward me. I scooped her up in my arms. We both screamed with delight as I swung her around, kissing her precious face. McKenzie was right behind me and when their eyes met, Favor reached for McKenzie. They embraced like long lost sisters. Favor showered her big sister with kisses on the cheeks, amidst the squeals of joy. Then Favor saw her daddy and her arms went up.

"There's my Princess!" Mark said, as he picked her up. He held her tightly. She was safe in her father's arms.