

DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

MISSY MAXWELL WORTON

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

Chapter 1

FINDING FAVOR

*“As the world slips into the deepest darkness,
the greatest lights will emerge...Warriors who
have not come to kill and destroy, but to
heal and set the captives free.”*

—Rick Joyner, author of *The Final Quest*

July 1, 2011 was a beautiful summer morning in Tennessee. My husband Mark and I stood on our dilapidated back deck, looking over some plans that I had drawn for a backyard makeover. We had that one yard in the neighborhood that was always mowed but badly needed a landscaper and some personality. Mark had received a big bonus from his company, and I was anxious to make our backyard more enjoyable for the whole family. As I pulled off a rotting piece of wood from our railing, I looked around and noticed weeds growing out of what once was my failed attempt to grow a container garden. It's safe to say that with my brown thumb, we would be in serious trouble if my family had to rely on me to grow our food.

“I wish it could be done right now,” I joked. “Tomorrow would be great—like how they do it on HGTV.”

“We've waited seven years,” Mark said. “What's another few months?”

In our family, Mark is the one who is patient—a wonderful quality for raising kids or bringing some balance and boundaries in a hectic world—but it also means he's not going to jump into anything very quickly, especially if it costs much money. He also stands six feet tall next to my *almost* five-foot frame, which makes him extremely hard to argue with, especially since I have to look up to him to make my point.

“True, but it would be nice to enjoy it before it gets cold!” I said with a raised voice, as Mark walked into the house. Mr. Wisdom had already spoken and left the scene.

My phone rang. It was my friend and neighbor, Cindy. Cindy and her husband had adopted five children from Ethiopia, and she was a vocal advocate for the millions of orphans around the world. Her teenage daughter, Hope, had inherited that same spirit and was spending her summer in Ethiopia, interning for Covenant Orphanages.

“Did you see the email I sent you?” she asked.

“No, not yet,” I answered. “Did you send something good?”

“Well, yes! Hope emailed me last night from the orphanage in Ethiopia. She's met a little girl who she says fits perfectly into your family. Hope says that she's a definite Worton.”

“What do you mean, she's a definite Worton?” I asked. *She must be really loud and obnoxious to fit into this family!* I thought.

“She's just full of life and sweet and you're not going to believe what her name is...” Cindy paused dramatically. “Her name is Favor!”

My heart leapt and my eyes immediately started to water. “Did you say...Favor?” I asked. “As in

God's favor?"

"Yes...Favor!" Cindy answered. "I knew you would just love that. You're always praying for favor."

She was right. As long as I could remember, I was always praying for the blessing of favor, talking about the love of God's favor, and praying God's favor over others. Favor was one of the best descriptions of God's unmerited grace. I had heard Graham Cooke, a Christian speaker, say, "Favor is a divine advantage at work in someone. We're not given favor because of who we are, or what we've done, but who Jesus is in us."¹ Favor was definitely one of my "go-to" favorite words.

Tears filled my eyes as I listened to Cindy tell me what Hope had seen at the orphanage where she was interning.

"Hope said that Favor just came into the orphanage. She is an older child, around five or six years old. She's precious."

Favor's name called out and grabbed me by the heart with a familiar sound. I knew that God had sent Hope to this orphanage to meet Favor. I had prayed for favor my whole life, but now it was connected to a little orphan girl who I knew needed us.

"Email Hope, and she'll tell you all about her," Cindy said. "Let me know what you find out. I am so excited!"

I hung up the phone. My heart was pounding out of my chest, and I knew I was pregnant with the thought of adding a sweet—and possibly loud—little girl to our family. I immediately hunted down Mark, who was busy working in the office.

"Hey, you got a moment? I just talked to Cindy and she's got some exciting news from Hope in Ethiopia."

Mark looked up at me with a *I'm not sure I want to hear this*, mixed with a *What is my wife getting us into now?* look.

"So, what has Hope been up to in Ethiopia?" he asked.

I paused, wanting to choose my words wisely, then threw all caution to the wind. "She met a little girl who needs a family," I blurted out.

He looked at me, not saying a word, then took a deep breath. "Well, then tell Hope to adopt her."

"Mark! Her name is Favor, and Hope says she's a definite Worton," I said.

"Why is she always trying to add children to our family?" Mark asked. "Did you ask her to be looking while she was there?"

"Mark, I have always told you that I knew there was another child out there for us, and I have always known that it was a girl," I said, as my mind suddenly went back to a reoccurring dream that I'd been having since we'd found out that our first adopted son, Shewit, had a sister. She would've been about the same age that Favor was now. We had such high hopes to adopt her until we were told that she had passed away, but a little girl would continue to visit me in my dreams. She was beautiful. She was dressed in a pink frilly dress, had eyes I could never forget, and wore a smile that would brighten up any room. I didn't know who she was, but I somehow knew that this little girl was supposed to be part of my life. My heart knew it, and I felt a hole where she was missing.

"And?" Mark said, pulling me back into the conversation

“And, I believe Hope has a very sensitive spirit. She doesn’t just try to add kids to our family. She knows who will be perfect for us. She said Favor is a Worton. She’s never said that about any child before.”

“Well,” Mark said, “is she LOUD?” We were both aware that with each child, our family was getting progressively louder. When we picked up Shewit, our third child and first adoption from Ethiopia, the orphanage director told us that they had been praying for us, knowing that we had to be a very “special” family. He was tons of fun, *extremely* active, and a bit mischievous.

“Well, it isn’t good timing for us,” he continued. “You know we can barely handle the kids we have. I thought you wanted a new backyard. We can’t do both! Can we just talk about this later?” I could see Mark was frustrated. He abruptly stopped the conversation and went back to work, but I knew it wasn’t over, and so did he.

I went to my room and emailed Hope. On one side, I knew that this little girl was our daughter. On the other side, I had a husband who had just told me that he wasn’t ready for another child. And the last time I was ready to adopt, it took more than three years for him to take the plunge. I also respected my husband and didn’t want to force anything on him—especially a child.

I decided to find out more about this little girl taking over my thought life. *Was she healthy? Was she abandoned? How old was she? Did she already have a family working toward adopting her?* There was so much about her that I wanted to know. I sent the email, and I prayed some kind of reply would quickly come.

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A few nights later, Mark walked into our bedroom. I could tell he was deep in thought. I had been careful not to say anything else about adoption, but I had spent many hours praying that if it was God’s will for us to have this little girl, that He would make a way. Mark’s heart would have to be changed. Two facets I know about my husband: he is open to hearing from God and he is quick to seek His face on major matters. As I looked at him, wondering what was going on, he seemed to be searching for the right words to say.

“Have you heard from Hope yet?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, still trying to read his face. “Are you really interested in knowing what she said?” Without a sound, he gave me the go-ahead to tell him.

“Favor is beautiful,” I started. “She’s healthy, she’s lost both her mom and dad, and she needs a family. Hope is checking with Pochi to see if Favor is available for adoption.” *Why is he asking if he isn’t ready? Is this a sign that things are changing?*

Mark stood silent.

“Mark, do you remember when I met Pochi the first time?” I asked. Pochi was the director at Covenant Orphanage where Favor was living. Pochi was a beautiful African woman who presented herself with a spunky confidence, and had a kind, but matter-of-fact way about her. She had visited America about a year and a half ago, and stayed with Cindy to visit four of the children Cindy had adopted from Covenant Orphanage.

“Wasn’t it right before we got Shewit from Ethiopia?” he asked. I could tell he was clueless beyond that, but I would never forget my first conversation with Pochi. Her words stirred my compassion

and sprouted a seed within my heart for a little girl.

“She told me that someday I would be coming to Ethiopia and adopting a little girl from her,” I said. “I’ve never forgotten that. I’ve been praying for favor my whole life. It will be exciting to see a picture of her.” I couldn’t hide my joy as I began to break into a smile.

Mark smiled. He knew it was true, but a struggle was going on inside of him. He was interested in Favor, but he wasn’t totally convinced that he was ready to go through the adoption process again. Transitioning another child into our family would change the dynamics again, and older-child adoptions come with challenges. “So, when is Hope supposed to be sending a picture?”

“I guess when she takes one,” I told him.

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In Ethiopia, Hope—who had come all the way from our neighborhood in Franklin, Tennessee—was helping the older children get ready for pictures. They loved the attention and the new clothes. Favor especially loved having her hair done. Hope straightened Favor’s tight curls and pulled them back in a neat ponytail. Favor looked at her blonde Barbie doll with a ponytail and pointed out that she and the doll had the same hair now. Hope took the pink dress off the bed and handed it to Favor. Her eyes widened with excitement as she squealed with joy. Pink was her favorite color, and she loved wearing frilly dresses!

Favor felt like a princess in her new dress and fixed hair. Hope pulled her camera from her satchel and took the kids into the front yard of the orphanage. Favor couldn’t stand still as Hope captured her on film. Her little fingers excitedly played in front of her and her eyes sparkled. In each shot, she radiated beauty and confidence. Without a doubt, there was something very special about this little girl. She had God’s favor all over her.

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The next morning Mark and I woke up early. Mark started checking email as I laid in bed, deciding if I wanted to get up yet.

“There’s an email from Hope,” he said. “It came with an attachment.”

I bolted up like a shot of caffeine had hit my heart.

Mark looked at me before he clicked on Hope’s email. “Are you ready to see what Favor looks like?” he asked. I nodded yes, but I could barely breathe. Mark took a deep breath, then clicked the attachment.

What happened in the next few moments felt like a dream. There she was—in her little pink, frilly dress—arms out in front of her, and oh, that smile! It immediately captured my heart. I looked at Mark, whose eyes were fixed on her. He didn’t say a word. As I looked at this sweet little girl, I knew without a doubt that I already loved her. It wasn’t her beauty that drew me...but something far stronger.

I already knew her.

“That’s her!” I whispered in amazement.

Mark looked at me for a moment. “Yes, it is.” Then he realized it was deeper. “Wait, what do you

mean?”

“That’s her!” I said again. “That’s the little girl who’s been coming to me in my dreams for the past two years!”

Mark took a closer look at the picture.

Incredibly, God had been preparing me to recognize Favor two years before I would ever lay eyes on her. His goodness rocked my world in that moment. Tears of thankfulness streamed down my face. My joy was uncontainable as I realized what God had done.

Now I just had to wait for Mark to be on board.



Our first glance at Favor. Could my dream of adopting a little girl become a reality?