

DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

MISSY MAXWELL WORTON

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

Chapter 26

BE STILL AND WAIT

*“...Therefore take up the whole armor of God,
that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,
and having done all, to stand firm.”*

—Ephesians 6:13, ESV

The trip back to The Academy was quiet and long. Mark looked down and saw a new pair of thong sandals.

“New sandals,” Mark said nonchalantly.

Dave didn’t look down, but kept his eyes straight ahead. Mark thought nothing of it as he continued to watch the crowds that filled the streets in Addis Ababa.

The girls held me close as we drove. I loved having them near me.

“You see what you’ve missed?” I asked, “This is what we do every time we’ve had to go to court and leave you.”

“I’ll take The Academy any day,” McKenzie said. “I hated today.”

“I’m sorry,” I said, “I know it was a huge bore to you.”

McKenzie pulled back and looked at me. I could see she was about to say something, then she looked around, shook her head and placed it on my shoulder, drawing close to my side. I kissed her on the forehead and leaned into her. I knew my little girl, and something was bothering her, but I could sense that this wasn’t the place to talk about it.

The streets were packed with people and cars as we approached The Academy, and Dave couldn’t drive an inch. We could see the big black gate to The Academy within walking distance from where we were stuck.

“Why don’t you let us out here and we can walk?” Mark suggested.

“It’s so close, and there is no way you’ll get across this road. It’s packed.” Mark could see Dave wasn’t sure about his suggestion.

“I can take care of all these girls,” Mark said, and puffed out his chest.

Dave smiled. He still looked uncomfortable with the idea, but he was running late with his plans, and he needed to get to the men’s camp.

“Besides,” Mark added, “Heaven help any man who tries to get close to my wife! She was raised with three older brothers, and she can take people out if they try anything.”

At that, Dave laughed and nodded that he was okay with Mark’s request. I had the girls cover their heads and gather their things, and we all jumped out of the car into a crowd of hurried strangers. I took the girls’ hands in mine and held them tight as Mark grabbed McKenzie’s hand. We pushed through the crowd until we stood in front of the welcoming black gate of The Academy. The security men greeted us and let us into our little home away from home.

Mark returned our day bags to the apartment and tried to check our emails, while I took the girls to the little snack shop on campus for some Injera bread with Shiro. Then I ordered some coffee and

popcorn for Mark and me. Altogether, it only cost us 25 birr, which would be the equivalent of two American dollars. As we stood and waited for our order, several people approached us to ask how our court appearance went. They each seemed genuinely interested in every detail. It touched me that so many people on this campus were concerned and had been praying faithfully for us.

Mark joined us a few minutes later. The internet was down because of a fluke accident. It had been turned off when the computer guy came to shut down the dial-up service and activate the broadband connection. They had turned off the wrong one, so we couldn't contact our prayer warriors to tell them how our court date went. Later we would find out that God was in all the details, but for now, I knew they would be chomping at the bit to hear something, so we called Julie and asked if she could post something on our Facebook page to thank them for their ongoing prayers. Julie was happy to help out.



McKenzie and Favor enjoying their daily Shiro with Injera bread at the coffee house at The Academy.

That night we joined the school in the gym for the loud and exciting championship boys volleyball game. McKenzie had made some signs to hold up to cheer for the boys from The Academy. It didn't take long before Favor grabbed them both and headed to the top bleacher to cheer with the other girls on campus. McKenzie laughed then joined in with Favor and the rowdy crowd. I don't think

either girl has a shy bone in her body, and that cheering must've worked. The boys won the Championship.

McKenzie ran down to me with something exciting to share. "Mom," she squealed, "the girls that live on campus have asked me to join them at a sleepover tonight. Can I do it? Please?"

I paused. "Did they ask just you, or did they ask for you and Favor to spend the night?"

"Just me," McKenzie said. "Mom, please? They live in the same building, down the hallway. I won't be far from you."

It had been almost four weeks since McKenzie had spent time with her friends back home. I knew she was lonely for some girl time. It would be good for her and us.

"Okay," I said. "Be careful. I'll take care of your dad."

McKenzie let out a shriek and threw her arms around my neck saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you! I am so excited they asked."

"Just be careful!" I said. "You aren't allowed to leave the campus, okay?"

"No," she said, "We're staying here. I'll drop in to get my PJs later." At that, she ran off to tell a group of girls waiting nearby. A group scream went out and everyone left in the gym turned to look.

"What was that about?" Mark asked.

"I'll tell you later," I said. I looked up at Favor jumping down the bleachers one row at a time. "You ready to go?" She quickly made her way down and grabbed my hand.

"What about Kenzie?" Mark asked, watching her run out the side door with a group of girls.

"She's having a sleepover with some of the girls that live on campus," I said.

"And, we're okay with that?" he asked. "Do you know these people?"

"Yes, I know these people. They've been praying for us, and I grocery shop with her mom. McKenzie's been through a lot. I'm okay with her having a night with girls. They live right down the hallway from our apartment. If she needs us, we're practically within an earshot. Are you okay with that?"

Mark gave me a sheepish look. "Just asking," he said. Then he made the sound of a cat hissing.

I started laughing. I guess I had come on a little strong with my sales pitch. I grabbed his hand and the three of us walked to our apartment for an evening together playing the memory game.

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The phone woke us up Saturday morning with a call from McKenzie. Her friend's parents, Leann and Tom, had invited us down for some waffles. We were so excited to have anything resembling American food that we tripped over each other trying to get dressed and out the door.

After we gorged ourselves on gluten-filled waffles, Mark took off with Tom, and I stayed to have a long talk with Leann before we joined back up to watch a soccer game at the complex. I did my best to get into the game, but watching kids play soccer only stirred my emotions and made me miss my son Shewit. I sat there and embraced the fact that I was in the land of his birth—the land where he first learned the love of soccer. He was already one of the top players for our local travel team, and he has dreams of becoming a professional player.

I was extremely homesick, and I could barely stand being in Ethiopia for one more minute. I could feel that sick feeling run through my veins and my eyes heat up with tears. I wanted to see my boys,

hold them, smell them, even if they smelled like dirty laundry or a boys locker room. I didn't care—my arms and heart ached for them. Then I had a sinking feeling. *What if this takes longer than we think? What if we're here for months?*

"Mark," I said, "do you think we'll win?"

Mark took a deep breath before he answered, "I don't know. I don't know what to expect. I feel like we have a strong case, and so does Mesfin."

"What if," I paused. "What if, for some reason, it's not over Monday and we have to stay longer?"

Mark looked down at the ground. He breathed out an audible sigh, as though the thought brought exhaustion to him.

"I don't know if I can stay any longer," I said. "I miss the boys too much."

"What are you saying?" Mark asked.

I didn't want to admit that I couldn't take anymore, but I could feel that I was at my end. "I've just come to a place that I just want to go home," I said. "No matter what. I don't have the energy to keep fighting."

"I don't believe you," Mark said. "You're tired and you just need some rest."

"No," I said, "I need my family to be together again. All of us. I want to hug my boys. I miss them so much." I could feel the tears building up in my eyes.

Mark looked up and squinted, the bright Ethiopian sun was beating down on us. "Favor is part of our family now," he said. "We can't leave her."

"What if they don't give us a choice?" I asked. "We've got three other kids to think about."

"I know," Mark whispered, "but, I don't believe God would bring us this far to lose like that. Where is that fighter I traveled here with to rescue her daughter from the bad guys? What's happened?"

I sat on the bench next to my husband. I was exhausted and couldn't think past that moment.

"We have to hold on to what God told us!" Mark said emphatically. "He said we would have victory, then He sent a prophet to our hotel to remind us that we will have victory."

"I do believe," I said. "I'm praying, believing, and I do have a peace that Favor will be allowed to come home with us. She will be ours." I paused. "I'm just not sure it will be Monday. What if it takes several more months?"

"Why would it?" Mark asked as if he couldn't believe his ears.

I didn't want to admit what I was thinking. I didn't want to give any room to the enemy. "It's just...every time we get our hopes up that we're going to go home, we get disappointed. There's always something else. I'm tired of waiting to take my daughter home."

Mark put his arm around me and pulled me close. "Me too," he said. "Me too," and he kissed my forehead. We sat in silence. There were no more words.

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That night, I boiled some potatoes and served them with salt and butter. The girls loved smashing them up in their bowls. They quickly got filled up, then helped me with clean up.

"I'll be right back," Mark said as he walked out the door.

"Girls, get your PJs on and brush your teeth," I said. "We have church at Pastor's tomorrow."

“Yes!” Favor said with excitement. “Pochi?”

“Yes, Pochi’s church.”

“I love that church Mom,” McKenzie said. “They have fun.”

“They do! I can’t wait to get in that atmosphere. I love it!” I said.

“You mean you love to worship,” McKenzie said.

“I do,” I said with a smile.

Mark walked in, carrying a black computer. “Tom let us borrow his computer. He has this gadget on it that allows us about 15 minutes of internet.”

“Really?” I said. “I can send out a quick email to our friends and family. Catch them up.”

“First, I’m going to book our flight back for Tuesday night.” Mark said.

“All four of us?” McKenzie asked. Mark didn’t say anything, and kept trying to get the connection up.

“All four of us?” she asked again.

“Honey,” I asked, “Did you hear your daughter?”

Mark looked up at McKenzie then back at me, “All four of us,” he said. Both girls screamed out with glee and started jumping around the room.

I smiled and gave him a big hug as he kept typing away.

“I believe,” Mark said as he connected with our agent and booked four seats back to America for the coming Tuesday night.

“Me too,” I said. Something about taking our words of faith and putting them into action pulled me out of the gloominess that had tried to depress me all day. Mark and I believed that we could go home on Tuesday, with no plan B, or C, for that matter. God gave us His promise: He had given us a victory. We had His word, and we shut the door on all other possibilities, because we served a God who could perform the impossible.

I quickly sent our prayer warriors a message to let them know how it went in court, and to give them the news that we had our flights booked for all four of us to return to the U.S. We had faith that all of us were coming home, and we had decided to start offering thanks to God for what we knew He had already done. Our flight was to arrive back in Nashville the night before Thanksgiving Day, and we were going to live out the rest of this journey in thanksgiving and praise!

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The church was alive with worship when we walked onto the property. Pastor waved to us from a distance. “It is a good day!” he exclaimed loudly. “God is good, my friends!” There was no better way to start living out the rest of our journey than at a faith-filled church, and we came expecting God to show up.

“Yes He is,” Mark yelled back. We were greeted with smiles as we walked into the church building. It seemed to be vibrating with joy. We walked toward the front until we found a seat. In the middle of worship, a beautiful little girl, about five years old, walked across the aisle to McKenzie, putting some green seeds in the palm of her hand. McKenzie looked down and got a big smile on her face.

McKenzie replied, “Amasedganalo (Ah-meh-she-guh-NAH-loh),” which means thank you.

The little girl’s eyes sparkled and opened up with surprise. She started speaking to McKenzie in

Amharic, thinking she knew her language, but McKenzie stood there clueless, smiling and nodding her head in agreement. The little girl reached up and hugged her; then she scampered back to sit with her mother and an older brother.

“Mom,” McKenzie asked, “What are these?”

I looked at the seeds in the palm of her hand, I’d never seen them.

“What do I do with them?” McKenzie asked.

The older brother waved to us and showed how to break them open and eat the seed inside. He was holding a branch full of the seed pods in his hand. It looked like a weed or something they picked on their way to church.

“Okay,” McKenzie said, “should I eat one?”

“Let’s try one,” I said. “I don’t think it’s bad or their momma wouldn’t let them eat it.”

During the next few minutes, McKenzie and I tried to open the pod, a job far more complicated than a seven-year-old boy made it seem. We got one partially opened, and to our surprise, the seed shot out like a bullet over the audience, hitting a man three rows in front of us on the head. The man looked back, scratching his head. McKenzie ducked and I closed my eyes to worship. Now the challenge was on, we had to beat this seed pod. So we tried again, and this time, we kept the seed in our hands. I tried it first. It tasted like a mild piñon or pine nut seed like we have in America. I could see I had an audience waiting to see if I liked it, so I looked their way and gave a thumbs up. Then McKenzie tried a seed. The family was overjoyed that they had shared their treasure with us. It was one of the sweetest things to see them share the way they did—especially since we knew food was one of their most valued possessions.

After church, the attorney that was representing the orphanage in court swiftly made his way to Mark. He was vivacious and almost glowing with a huge smile.

“How are you and your wife feeling about your case?” he asked Mark.

“We feel good,” Mark said. “We’re just standing and believing.”

The attorney, as if pausing for effect, stopped and smiled a knowing smile. “This has been so powerful to watch what God has done through your family. Your faith has inspired me to have more faith in God,” he said.

He looked down at his shoes then up at Mark with a grin, “You make sure to call me before you leave,” he said. “Okay?” At that, he hugged Mark and gave him a sturdy handshake before turning and walking toward Pochi.

“That’s all you’re going to tell me?” Mark yelled to him.

He turned and smiled.

Pochi and Pastor walked up to us. “We want to take you out to lunch,” Pochi said. “Where would you like to go?”

“That’s your call,” Mark said.

“You liked the Italian restaurant overlooking Addis a lot,” Pochi said. “Let’s go to Topview.”

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At the restaurant, packed with people coming out to eat after church, we pulled two tables together under an umbrella on the patio. Pochi and Pastor were all smiles as we settled in for an Italian lunch

on the mountain.

“So,” I said, “What was your attorney so excited about today?”

“He says that everyone is talking about this case. They are all very excited to see how it comes out. It amazes people in so many ways,” Pochi said.

“Why is that?” Mark asked.

“You are going up against very powerful people for the sake of a little girl,” Pochi said. “This makes people think about David and Goliath. God is the only way you could win this.”

“God *is* the only way we can win,” Mark agreed.

“Yes,” Pochi agreed. “This is why it amazes people so much. They want you to win.”

People wanted us to win. That statement profoundly moved us. Complete strangers were watching and waiting, alongside friends and family, to see how a little girl’s future would unfold. It was a David-and-Goliath, a good-versus-evil tale.

“Have you heard anything about the official in Debre Birhan?” I asked.

“He is very angry,” Pastor said, shaking his head.

Pochi started laughing and said, “He called the foster mother Friday night and harassed her for going and testifying for you. He called so late that it only made her mad, and she let him have it. Oh, she was angry at him.”

Pastor made a comedic face, like he’d seen that anger flare up before.

“Can they do anything to her?” I asked.

“For what?” Pochi said. “She went in and told the truth. That’s all. She told him that she went because it was the right thing to do.”

Mark and I listened as Pochi continued to share all that had happened since our court date on Friday.

“She asked him, ‘Why wouldn’t you want me to testify, if I was only going to tell what was the truth? What was not the truth that I said?’ He did not answer her.” Pochi said.

“I think he needs to be a little scared of her. She’s a strong one,” I said as I looked toward Mark to see if he remembered Friday’s statement.

“I’m weak,” Mark said on cue.

“What?” Pochi asked, confused.

“Oh,” Mark explained, “She had said I was weak on Friday, because she caught me crying over something DJ said to me. It didn’t bother me.”

“She is a very strong woman though, to stand up to an official like that. She’s got some guts!” I said.

Pastor smiled and nodded his head in agreement.

“She cares about these children,” Pochi said. “She has been with me a long time, and she does not like to see what they are doing to these children. She knows it is wrong. We all do.”

“Well, we will forever be grateful that she kept Favor and these other kids out of the hands of the a foster care program,” I said.

“How is Emebet?” I asked.

“They are calling to harass her too,” Pochi said, “but she doesn’t answer her phone.”

“She’s a strong one too,” I said. Favor leaned up against me, ready to leave. “I wonder how strong this one will turn out.”

Pochi looked at Favor getting into my lap. “She is a very strong little girl,” Pochi said. “God has big plans for her—I’m sure of it.” Favor sat in my lap as we enjoyed the rest of our time with Pochi and Pastor.

Feeling the breeze blow across the mountain top as the sun beat down on us, I felt—for the first time—that our battle could be coming to a close. We had done everything that we were asked to do, and I didn’t want to miss what God was going to do next. So, having done all, we now stood and waited on God to do the rest.