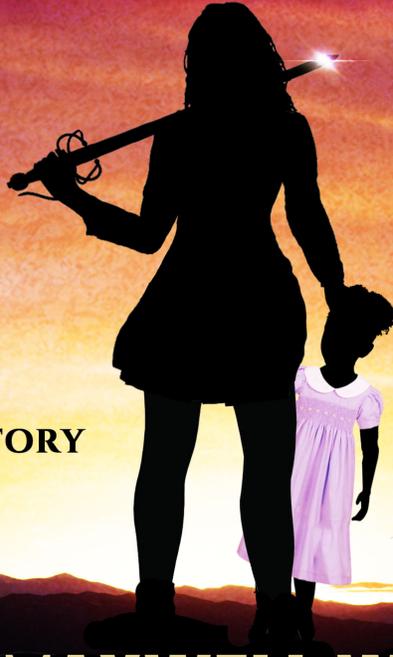


DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

MISSY MAXWELL WORTON

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

Chapter 8

PUT YOUR FEET ON THE SOIL

*“Like a child who trusted without question,
she knew every word from her Father’s mouth
would happen.”*

—Missy Maxwell Worton

It had been a long night. We had just flown through the roughest turbulence that we had ever experienced. I was sincerely surprised that the plane could handle all the pounding and jolting drops that it took. The airline hosts looked worn and exhausted, probably rethinking their career choices and insurance plans.

Breaking through the clouds, we could see the sun rising in the distance, as if to say, *Welcome to a new, calmer, less bumpy day.*



Sunrise in Ethiopia

I wanted to sit up taller in my chair to see if we were still over the ocean, but I couldn’t move. Somehow in her sleep, McKenzie had thrown her body over mine and was half on the floor and half on my chest. About that time, a loud flight attendant came by with breakfast. She pointed to McKenzie and said, “Wake her up! She needs to eat.” I managed a smile and tried to wave her off, but she insisted. So, I woke up Sleeping Beauty.

It wasn’t pretty.

During the next few minutes, I played peace keeper between the sleepy, grouchy tween and the grumpy flight attendant. McKenzie took one bite of the airline food and growled, “Really, you woke me up for this!”

“And...wow, look at that!” I said, looking past her to a golden canvas beneath us. We had flown completely out of any cloud cover and were flying somewhere over Egypt. The land was brown with

golds, oranges, and tints of red weaving through it. It had an enchanting beauty, even with no sign of water.

Finally, we could feel the plane start to make its descent. As we came closer, I watched the ground below me. Our view that once was desert had changed into miles and miles of green, lush land. Farms of various crops were growing in rectangles and squares below us. Although we could see the homes showed a level of poverty, the land of Ethiopia was beautiful and bursting with life.

As I watched the buildings get larger, I knew I was closer to the promise that God had given us. If we would just put our foot on the soil of Ethiopia, the victory would be ours. I looked over at Mark and grabbed his hand. “I can see the soil of Ethiopia,” I said. “Can you?”

Mark looked past me to the window. “I wonder what God is going to do,” he said.

“Something great!” I said with confidence.

Once we landed, we stepped off the plane onto nothing but concrete.

I started looking for soil to put my foot on. I was taking God literally when He said to put my feet on the soil, and I didn’t want to waste any time staking claim to my victory! Finally, I found a little patch of soil off to the side of the terminal. Going against the flow of people, I anxiously weaved through them to get my foot on that dirt. I looked up at Mark in triumph the moment my foot touched it, and I stood on it for a moment, letting it sink in.

Victory!

I wondered to myself what had been activated in Heaven. *Were angels celebrating and spiritual breakthroughs launched at that moment?* McKenzie smiled, then rolled her eyes, like she usually does when Mom goes into her “crazy” zone. Mark just looked like he wanted to get to the hotel as soon as possible.

We went through customs, got our luggage, and looked for Josiah from EAI Ethiopia. He was timidly standing off to the side. His countenance was different this time. Instead of the friendly, warm welcome that we had received before, he cautiously approached us, said that he didn’t have enough room in his car, and told us that we would have to take the hotel shuttle. He confirmed with Mark that he would pick us up the next day for our embassy date, then he quickly left with a woman who had also flown in from America. We were bewildered. The agency had always picked us up in the past...and why was Josiah acting so weirdly toward us?

Mark smelled his armpit. “I don’t think I smell that bad,” he said.

“Uh, Dad!” McKenzie said, acting disgusted. “That is just gross!” I started laughing—I knew we could come across as a strange crew. Maybe Josiah just didn’t want to be seen with us.

* * * * *

The Hilton had been our go-to place—the staff was friendly, it was secure, and the points Mark had managed to earn while he was traveling made it close to free, which was perfect for our dwindling budget. While Mark checked in, McKenzie and I plopped ourselves down on the nearest couch. Our travel delay had caused us to arrive close to two hours later than planned, and we were exhausted.

I started watching the people around me while McKenzie fell back asleep. Some people were busy, walking off the elevator and quickly out the front doors looking straight ahead. In the corner, some well-dressed men were enjoying the Ethiopian coffee ceremony being served by a beautiful Ethiopian

woman in ceremonial dress.

I heard the elevator ding again. This time, a couple walked out, looking around. I immediately recognized Chris Overstreet—the man who had prayed for me a few weeks ago at a church in Franklin—but what were he and his wife doing in Addis Ababa? They walked by, stopped, turned around, and came back to where I was sitting.

“Are you stranded here because of the storm?” Chris asked.

I stood up. “No, we’re here for our embassy date,” I answered. “We’re adopting.”

“Whoa, that’s awesome!” he said. “Really awesome!”

“Thank you,” I said. “So, are you stranded here because of Hurricane Sandy?”

“Yeah,” he started. “We just finished up doing some mission work in Uganda and Mozambique. It was awesome there. Anyway, we were just on our way back to the U.S. when our plane suddenly got diverted to Ethiopia. It was crazy. The airline put us up in another hotel, but we felt we were supposed to come over here and stay one night. We got the last available room. We’re just on our way out to check on flights.”

I listened in amazement. *I knew Chris was sent by God to remind us of the promises that He had spoken to me through this man.* I also realized that if our plane had been on time, we would have never run into Chris and his wife, because we would have already been in our room asleep when they were in the lobby. God was telling me to take notice, remember, and be encouraged in His words. He had orchestrated another miracle on our path to Favor—diverting a plane to Addis Ababa and Chris switching hotels—all for this moment.

“Are you adopting a little boy or girl?” his wife asked.

“A little girl,” I answered. “Actually, we really need prayer for our predicament. There’s been a real battle over this adoption, and she has been taken out of the orphanage. Today or tomorrow we have a rescue mission planned to bring her out of this corrupt situation and back into our arms.”

“Well, let’s pray right now!” Chris said without hesitation, and both he and his wife grabbed my hands and began to pray.

Father, we lift up this situation to You. Nothing is too big for You, and we know how much You love the orphans and how You have put this family with this little girl. I lift up this little girl before You, Lord, and I see **favor** going before them in this situation. Lord, I pray You will give them **favor** with this rescue, and Lord that they shall have victory and **favor** in all that they do! I just ask, that in everything You do for this couple, You will pour out Your **favor** and bless them for taking care of the orphan. Amen!

I started giggling after Chris had said favor for the fourth time. “Did I tell you her name was Favor?” I asked.

He got a huge smile on his face. “No way!” he said. “God is so awesome. That’s a great name!” He raised his hand to give me a high five. “Man, I just kept hearing you would receive “favor.” My name is Chris Overstreet by the way, and this is my wife, Stefanie.” He extended his hand to me.

“I’m Missy,” I answered as I shook his hand. “The girl sleeping on the couch is my daughter, McKenzie, and my husband, Mark, is checking in. We went to see you speak at an event near Nashville,

Tennessee, and you gave me a word there. I really think that word was for right now.”

“Really?” he said with amazement, “That is so cool! Now, here we run into you in Ethiopia...wow! God is so cool like that!”

I couldn’t agree more.

We finished up our talk, and both Chris and his wife gave me a big hug before they left the hotel. I stood in awe at what had just taken place. When I told Mark, we both realized that God was using this moment to build our faith and to show us that we were in the right place. He could bring anyone into our path and meet us where we had a need. At the time, we knew what had happened was amazing, but we didn’t know how important these few minutes would be to us in the coming days.

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After we took a quick nap, we made our way to the lobby to see Pochi. When we saw each other, we rushed to hug. She held me as if to not let go. I could tell that she was broken and hurting. We were both in a place we had never been before, and all our feelings were revolving around a little girl. After the initial greetings, we found a quiet place to sit and talk. Pochi looked in every direction to make sure no one was within earshot of our conversation.

“We need to be very careful,” Pochi said, leaning into us. “You never know who could be listening.” Mark and I looked around. We were alone. “I’m sure you want to know what is going on.”

“That would be good,” Mark said.

“As you know,” Pochi started, “when Favor’s aunt found out that they were not going to release Favor to you, she took a bus two hours to see the government official in Debre Birhan. She told him she didn’t want Favor to go into the foster care program, and she said that she would take her home with her to prevent that. She argued that as Favor’s aunt she had the right to do that. She was very careful not to mention you.”

Mark and I glanced at each other.

“She is very brave,” Pochi said. “She convinced the official of her plans and he told her to come back Monday or Tuesday of this week and fill out some paperwork. Then they would release Favor, only to her.”

“Can she get in trouble for bringing Favor to us?” I asked.

“We’ll talk about that later,” she said, holding her hand up uncomfortably and pausing for a moment. “The plan is for her to take the bus up to Debre Birhan, either this morning or tomorrow. She will sign the paperwork and then be given Favor. She is going alone so that they don’t suspect anything. She wants to bring Favor to you here, at your hotel.”

“That’d be great,” Mark said.

“But, I talked with her this morning,” she continued. “She is in the hospital. She got very sick a few days ago.”

“Is she the only one the official will give Favor to?” I asked.

“Yes, she is the only one, and she says she will go tomorrow,” Pochi said, “even if she doesn’t feel well. She is very happy that you came. She was afraid that you wouldn’t come when you heard about the other family.”

“What do you mean, *the other family*?” Mark asked. “Are you talking about the family who came

back without their child?”

“Yes, the family that came for their embassy appointment last week,” Pochi cautiously said. “Their little girl is at the same place as Favor. When they came to pick her up, they weren’t allowed to even see her. They went back to America after two days, and hired a lawyer to handle it for them. But their case is not going anywhere. It doesn’t look good. Nobody cares, and there is just too much corruption.”

“Where is the corruption?” Mark asked. “Did this happen to just your orphanage or are there others?”

Pochi looked uncomfortable as she glanced around. “The regional government office targeted three orphanages. My orphanage was the only one with older children, so they decided to put four of them in a foster care that UNICEF created to keep children in their birth country. But they are never supposed to take children out of orphanages. These children were in the process of adoption.”

Mark felt his stomach tighten.

“By the way,” Pochi said, changing the subject, “when I spoke with EAI today, at first they said they had no knowledge of you arriving in Addis.”

“But, Josiah talked to us at the airport!” I said. Mark and I were shocked. *Why were they pretending that they didn’t know?* Now Mark was concerned about getting to the Embassy tomorrow.

“I don’t know why they said that,” Pochi said, “so I just acted like I knew nothing about you as well.”

“Well,” Mark said, “that explains why Josiah acted the way he did.”

“But, when I called back, another lady told me that Josiah was told not to bring you to the EAI office,” she said. “They are trying to avoid you. The EAI office is still denying that you are in Ethiopia.”

Mark and I sat silent. We felt like the ugly step child. EAI, as our agency, was supposed to be on our side, but the people there sure weren’t acting like it.

“I am so sorry this has happened to you,” Pochi said apologetically. “I would never have taken her back to Debre Birhan had I known this would happen. The foster mother was afraid the regional official would do something to her if she didn’t take Favor to them before she left for America. Now they know where Favor is. The official went back on their word. They don’t want her to go to America.”

“Do you think the plan to rescue Favor will work?” Mark asked.

“Nothing is for sure,” Pochi said, shrugging her shoulders.

We didn’t know what to say. We were in way over our heads. We prayed with Pochi before she left, then got McKenzie from the couch, and walked outside to the pool area. We stared blankly at the people laughing and splashing around. McKenzie ran over to dip her toes in the warm mineral water.

“I still feel like there is something Pochi isn’t telling us.” I said, looking straight ahead.

“I agree,” Mark answered. “I feel it too.”

I looked down. I was standing on a grassy area. I slid my sandals off to put my feet on the soil as a reminder of the promise I had received before we came. The soil was cool to the touch and the wet dew started to cover my toes.

I prayed silently...*Jesus, my feet are on the soil, but I feel like my victory is so far away and untouchable. I’m*

trying to be positive and trust Your promises, but really, I'm scared. We need Your help, Lord. I don't want to leave without her.

“Dad,” McKenzie’s voice startled me, “can we go swimming?”

“Yes,” Mark answered. “Let’s grab breakfast first, and then come back down.”

McKenzie jumped up and down, clapping her hands. Like a child who trusted without question, she knew every word from her father’s mouth would happen. She had been looking forward to coming and getting her little sister since the day we told her we had decided to adopt a little girl. She seemed unaffected by what was happening around her. Joy and expectancy filled her every word, and she was embracing every moment. McKenzie was a picture for Mark and me depicting how we could also behave in this difficult situation. We needed to trust without question that our Heavenly Father would be faithful to His word. We had done our part—our feet were on the soil. We were in Ethiopia for a victory—whether it felt like it or not.